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SABINA ZEMBRA

SABINA ZEMBRA

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES

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SABINA ZEMBRA

CHAPTER XXXV

THE EXILE'S RETURN

It was not until the month of December in that year that Walter Lindsay left for home; and a very cold, gray, and cheerless passage he had of it across the Atlantic. But a landscape painter, of trained observation and retentive memory, has advantages beyond those of other mortals. At will he can dismiss his actual surroundings; and, by the mere shutting of his eyes, summon before him scenes from distant lands; and not only that, but these visions are ordinarily of unwonted beauty, because it is their beauty that has stamped them on his mind. Nay, he can occupy himself with filling in the minutest details of colour and form, until the living picture stands clear and sharp before him: no need for him to sadden himself, hour after hour, with the monotonous waste of the steel-gray, slow-rolling Atlantic seas.

You may be sure it was mostly England that was in

Lindsay's thoughts, as, wrapped in Canadian furs, he paced up and down the chill decks on these blowy mornings; or, in the hushed evenings, in the great saloon, lay and only half listened to the heavy throbbing of the screw and the occasional singing of a group of girls. And he tried to be not always dreaming about Kensington Square. Here, for example, was a winter scene on the Sussex coast; and he added touch after touch to it, as if he had a canvas before him, and with a kind of affection almost. A bright morning shining over the wide, smooth, solitary downs; here and there a dark-green turnip-field; here and there a breadth of red ploughed land; a farm-steading near the horizon; the new roofs of the barns and outhouses scarlet-tiled, the old roofs orange-lichened. A small hamlet in a distant hollow; a few pigeons flying about the weather-stained belfry of the church-tower. A long-winding, ruddy-yellow road in front of him, of chalk and sand and flint; the pools of recent rain—those near him—of a brownish-saffron hue; those a little farther off a faint purple (the reflected blue of the zenith mixing with the local colour); those still farther away of the most brilliant azure. A cloudless sky; a cold wind; the keen sunlight striking vividly on the long-trending lines of the chalk cliffs, and on the wide pale plain of the sea.

Or again, it would be a sheltered little bay that he had once discovered in the far northern wilds of his own country—a silent, unfrequented curve of white sand facing the western waves. And what beautiful bits of colour he

found there, or placed there, as his fancy chose—brown and lilac pebbles, velvet-soft in the light, each with its touch of blue shadow; scattered masses of ox-eye daisies, hardly moving in the soft summer air; thistles purple-topped; the crimson-stemmed sorrel; the silver-weed, with its leaves of intensest green, and its long rose-red threads stretching out over the cream-white soil, and rooting themselves here and there. Behind him a golden-yellow corn-field; before him a sea of driven and vivid blue; beyond that a pale line of distant hills; and above these again a sky of faintest turquoise, deepening and deepening into a dark sapphire overhead.

Moreover, he had cultivated this habit of minute and patient picture-building for an especial reason. Once or twice it had occurred to him that his eyesight was not as good as it had been. Now an artist is naturally extremely sensitive on this point; and it is hardly to be wondered at that in the solitariness of his life among the Canadian lakes, or on the wide Colorado plains, he should sometimes have been haunted by gloomy forebodings. On such occasions he would summon his philosophy to his aid, and boldly face the worst. What, then, if he were to become blind? He had enough to live on. Probably he had given to the world the best he could do as an artist. He would retire to some place familiar to him—Galloway, most likely; and spend there a by no means miserable existence; for surely, if his attendant gave him a hint or two—the flowers by the

wayside, the look of the sky, the number of ships visible from Kirkcolm Point, and the like—he could construct out of his own memory some recognisable picture of his surroundings. No number of years could make him forget (for example) the colour of the silver-weed's rose-red stems creeping out on the milk-white sand. Then, again, in some distant time he might come to London. Perhaps at Janie's house he would meet Sabina. And then would he not have reason to rejoice? 'Why,' he would say to himself, 'look what an advantage you have over all these others. Sabina is middle-aged now; perhaps her hair is streaked with silver; perhaps the youthful brilliancy has faded away from her kind eyes. These others see all that; you do not. When you hear her speak, she is still to you the Sabina of former years; to you she remains ever beautiful, youthful, radiant; her eyes are more than kind, they have the witchery of young womanhood, and so it will be to the end. She grows old to others; not to you. So thank God for your blindness and rest well content.' Of course these were the morbid imaginings of a solitary life and distant travel. When he returned to New York—and to the Tile Club, and the Monks of St. Giles, and the theatres and dinner-parties, and the ordinary amusements and occupations of social life—he forgot all about them, and ceased to trouble his head about the matter.

But if these were beautiful pictures of England he was summoning up, as he paced the deck under the leaden

gray sky, or sat in the saloon of an evening listening to the dismal boom of the foghorn overhead, England sorely disappointed him when he arrived there. It was raining heavily at Liverpool; and Liverpool on a wet, darkening December afternoon is not an exhilarating sight. On his journey up to London next day a cold damp mist lay over the land; and the great hive of the metropolis, as he drove through the sombre streets, was scarcely the brilliant city of his memories and dreams. But when he reached his home, there something more cheerful awaited him; for Janie (who had a house and her husband a studio of their own now), had been along to see that the housekeeper had everything in readiness; and there was a big fire blazing in the dining-room; and luncheon was on the table; and there were a few flowers also, placed there by Janie's own hands: altogether the place looked exceedingly bright, warm, comfortable, and homelike.

Luncheon did not take him long: but there was a vast pile of letters, prints, and packages to be glanced through; then he was ready to go out. But whither? He wished to see Janie; but it was rather early yet for an afternoon call. Eventually he put on his coat and hat and went out; and by instinct rather than intention wandered idly down to High Street, Kensington.

It was strange to find himself in the old familiar thoroughfare, and it looking so different from his storied memories of it. Somehow he had been used to picture it

as under the light of a clear summer afternoon; himself come out after his day's work; perhaps with some faint hope of catching a glimpse of the tall form of Sabina on her way homeward to Kensington Square. But now the short December day was drawing into dusk; a pale blue mist hung about; the streets were miry. It is true that with all this the neighbourhood wore a festive air; evergreens and holly-berries were in the shop-windows; the pavements were crowded with elderly people who seemed benign of aspect, and who were generally accompanied by small folk who had the delight and excitement of Christmas presents clearly shining in their eyes. And he was glad to be home in England for Christmas.

At last—at last—and perhaps with some trifle of heart-throbbing that he would hardly care to have owned—he went a little way down Young Street, so that he could look across Kensington Square. It was a doleful sight enough—the leafless, smoke-blackened trees; the dank green grass; the dingy laurels; the bedraggled chrysanthemums; with the melancholy gray-blue pall of the twilight weighing heavier and heavier, and as yet unpierced by a single orange ray. And yet he had a curious kind of affection for this place; and the keenest interest in it; and those old-fashioned houses over there had a charm for him beyond any range of palaces in Venice. They were very different, doubtless, from his dreams of them in the far Canadian wilds. There they had been of a golden cast; with light summer airs

floating about them, and a June foliage on the trees; now they were dark, and indeed almost becoming invisible in the closing down of the melancholy London afternoon. But they were actual. They had human life within them. Was it possible that on this northern side (which he could not see) Sabina might be standing at the window of the well-remembered drawing-room, looking out on this very picture of desolation? He dared not go nearer. He wished to be prepared for meeting her, if he was to meet her. But he lingered about there for some time; until of a sudden a shaft of golden fire flashed through the dusk from the first-lighted of the lamps, and he thought he might now go and call upon his ever-faithful friend.

He found Janie in possession of a smart little house in Victoria Road; and the moment he entered the drawing-room she came quickly to meet him, with both hands extended, and with abundant friendliness beaming in her mild gray eyes.

'I am so glad to see you!' she cried; and added rather incoherently, 'And all of us—all of us—of course you ought to be back in your own country. I am so glad you have come back!' But there was some surprise in her face too. 'And how you have changed! I don't believe I should have known you if I had met you in the street. You are more like a hunter than an artist!'

'I have been living a good deal of a backwoodsman's life these last two or three years,' he said: and indeed she

could have guessed as much; for the fine-featured face had lost all its pallor of former days and become evenly sun-browned; and his tall and slender figure had a touch of added breadth; and there was a more muscular set of the shoulders. Janie was quite proud—though she did not stay to ask herself why—to see him look so handsome and well.

Of course there were a hundred rapid and cheerful questions to be put and answered; and she gave him all the information she had about the people known to them; but the subject really uppermost in both their minds was sedulously left out. Janie was a little frightened, in truth. Perhaps he had come home engaged? Or he might even have brought a wife with him? On his side, some kind of delicacy kept him silent. And so it came about that it was quite by accident that Sabina was brought into the conversation.

Behind him there was a picture he had not as yet seen, for he was seated facing the window. It was let into a panel over the mantelpiece; and on the oak framework there was inscribed, in curious characters, the word 'Hesperus.' The subject was the solitary upright figure of a tall young woman, clad in loose draperies, moving through the ethereal spaces of the evening sky; some sombre gleams of red beneath her feet; the darkening heavens above her showing here and there a distant star; her upraised arm and hand holding high before her a ball of luminous white fire. Her face was sad

and wan; her mouth pensive; her eyes wide apart and mysterious and dim. Mannered even to the verge of affectation, this was really a very creditable piece of work; it showed, at all events, imaginative effort; and as it was a wedding-present that Janie had received from her husband, it is hardly to be wondered at that she had insisted on its occupying the place of honour in her drawing-room.

Now in the mutual embarrassment of trying to avoid all mention of Sabina's name, they had talked about a large variety of persons and things; and at last Lindsay came to speak of Janie's new house, which her husband had furnished in a highly superior fashion. Happening to cast his eyes about the room, he caught sight of this picture, and there was something about the look of the head that caused him to get up and go nearer. But he had not been there for a second—gazing at the pensive face and the dim and mystic eyes—when Janie was at his side.

'But, you know, Mr. Lindsay,' she said, rather breathlessly and anxiously, 'you mustn't think that is really like her—*really* like her, I mean—you know, that is only Phil's way of painting—Sabie isn't quite so—quite so—sad-looking as that. Of course it is a *little* like; but it was done from photographs and recollection; and, you know, Phil will paint in his own way. Oh no, don't think Sabie is like that!'

And Walter Lindsay thought to himself, 'Well, men say that women are never really friends among themselves. But here is a woman who, for fear that an unfavourable impression

of a friend of hers may be produced on a casual stranger, is quite content to speak slightingly of her own husband's work!'

'She is in London?' he said, still looking at those saddened eyes.

'Oh no,' said Janie, who, now that the ice was broken, proved as eager to give information as before she was reticent. 'No; I wish she was. She won't leave that house in Surrey, no matter what we say; it seems it was a wish of her husband's; though why she should respect any wish of his, or his memory either, I can't make out. Oh, Mr. Lindsay, I never told you half the truth about poor Sabie. I couldn't. I thought it was no use making you wretched—I mean, I naturally imagined you would remember something of her, however far away you might be, and you mightn't like to hear ill news of a friend. And I need not tell you now either, for it is all over; and I hope Sabie will forget it in time. And sooner or later, I know, we shall have Sabie coming to London; and there are two houses, anyway, where there is a home and a warm welcome awaiting her; for Phil is just as good as gold—why, where do you think he is just now?'

'I'm sure I don't know.'

'Away buying Christmas toys to send down to the little boy. And a rare hash he will make of it, I suppose, for how should he know? But I thought I would stay in, as I expected you.'

She went back to her seat by the table, and he followed her.

'I suppose you see her sometimes?' he said.

'Oh yes,' she answered; and then she added quickly, 'And if you were to call upon her, there would be no—no embarrassment, for we have tacitly agreed never to speak about the past at all. It is the best way; and we adopted it from the very beginning. You know, Phil has a great deal of common sense and wisdom for one of his dreamy and poetical nature; and he warned me, the first time I went down to see Sabie, that if I said anything against Foster, she might very likely turn on me to defend him. Very well, I said to myself, if I am to say no harm of him, I will say no good of him; for I am not going to tell lies, even in the way of condolence; and if Sabie likes to forget, I won't. Of course it was very awkward; and I looked forward to meeting her with dread; but there happened the greatest stroke of luck. Just as I got out of the train at Witstead Station, so did Sir Anthony Zembra. I suppose she had sent for us both on the same day; but it was pretty fortunate we should go down by the same train. I thought that Sir Anthony would have forgotten me; but he spoke to me; and we walked to the house together. Do you see how lucky it was? I had to tell no lies, anyway, or profess a grief that I certainly didn't feel; nothing but the most ordinary commonplaces was said; Foster's name was hardly mentioned; what Sir Anthony

wanted mostly was to get her to remove to London. You should have seen how he figured and posed as the injured party; how magnanimously he offered to forget the past; and produced a cheque for £100—this was before me, mind—to defray all little expenses, and leave her free to move into the house he offered to take for her. I do believe he thought he was the most magnanimous man in this country at that moment; and was himself astonished that he did not complain of her conduct or say hard things of her dead husband. Not that I quarrel with him on that account; the dear departed would have had none of my tears, if they had been asked for. And you should have seen Sir Anthony's splendid air when he announced to her that he should now give her the same allowance that she had before her marriage; as if she had condoned everything now by burying that wretch.'

Janie stopped suddenly, and her pale face showed a little colour.

'Please, Mr. Lindsay, you won't think me cruel! Phil says I am unwomanly. But you don't know—and he doesn't know—what poor Sabie has suffered. Not that she shows much trace of it—oh no. Oh, you must not think that at all,' said Janie, earnestly. 'She may be a little grave in manner; but—but—you must rather think of her as she was the night of your supper-party—you remember?—only not dressed like that; for I think she is pinching and saving hard on account of the boy. I assure you, Sabie

is just as beautiful as ever—a little paler perhaps; and you remember the splendid hair; and the sweet mouth; and the way she walked, as if all the world were hers. You can't throw that off in a minute; and now, when you find her in a good-humour, and laughing and playing with the boy—well, it's just beautiful to look at! I do wish you could see her!'

But here again Janie stopped suddenly, conscious of indiscretion. He sat silent for a second or two; then he said (not noticing the familiarity), 'I will tell you the truth, Janie. I went away to America hoping to forget a good deal. Yes, I thought that was natural. I had no complaint to make; I had no bitter memories to carry with me; no, it was rather many, many kindnesses that I had to remember, if I remembered anything; but at all events I expected to forget what I wanted to forget; and if anybody had said to me that I should come back married, I should have answered that I did not think so, but that it was not in the least impossible. I have been away about two years and a half. It is not a very long time, perhaps; but I have had the chance of seeing a great many people; and I have had long spells of solitude and reflection. Well, I am more than ever convinced that there is but the one woman in the world for me—no, stop a moment,' he said calmly, for he could not but see that her eyes had flashed with pride and pleasure: 'don't imagine I am going to rush in the moment there is no longer any obstacle, and ask her to

marry me. I don't think I ever did actually ask her to marry me; though, I suppose, she guessed. No; what I say is, there is now, and must always be for me, but the one woman in the world; only it is for her to choose what relationship should exist between us; and I will abide by that. If she would rather be my sister—my companion—my friend, good; let it be so. But if I am to be her friend, I must claim the privileges of a friend; and you seem to think she is not so well off as she might be. Well, I did not spend very much during these two or three years in America—the Scotch are a penurious race, you know; and I got through a good deal of work. What do you say, now: will you find out how I can help her?'

'How can I?—but—but—but the first thing for you is to go and see her!' said Janie, rather wildly. 'Mr. Lindsay, when Phil comes home with the parcels, will you take them with you, and go down to-morrow to Witstead? It would be an excuse. I want you to see Sabie!'

'No,' he said slowly. 'Not yet. I must think over how I am to meet her.'

At this moment Janie's husband was heard at the front door; and presently he entered with his bundles of toys. After a few words, he carried Lindsay off to his studio, no doubt anxious for a little encouragement; and so Janie was left alone in the front part of the house. Her brain was in a whirl. She was prophesying all kinds of beautiful things for her beloved Sabie. The rescuer had come. Andro-

meda was to have her chains dashed off at last. And again and again there rang through her head the lines—

Sir David Lindsay of the Mount,
Lord Lyon King at Arms,

as if that heroic couplet could in any way be made to refer to one of the Lindsays of Carnryan, who, besides, was but a mere nineteenth-century landscape-painter, recently come home from America with a few dollars in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXXVI

NEW QUARTERS

'And this is what they call the jocund morn,' Walter Lindsay remarked to himself, as he was leisurely dressing by gas-light. It was about nine o'clock. Outside, the great world of London lay steeped in a heavy and slumberous fog, dense, immovable, mysterious, with here and there a black ghost passing through the saffron-hued darkness. And yet he did not complain over much. There were other and more cheerful visions before his eyes. He was about to take a little run down into Surrey, just to recall what an English winter was like in the country; and it was quite possible that he might be led into making a series of water-colour studies—extending over several months, indeed—if only he could find convenient quarters.

Nor did he at all seek to conceal from himself that his main purpose in going down into the country was that he might perhaps have Sabina for neighbour. No; on the contrary, he strove to persuade himself that he should approach her without any anxiety or misgiving whatever. Why should there be any embarrassment? He would have

nothing to do with trembling hopes and fears. It was for Sabina herself to decide what their relationship should be —of the simplest, if so she wished it. But she could hardly refuse him her friendship. She would not turn away from him without a reason. And it would be a very pleasant thing for him to know that this beautiful sister and companion—or acquaintance, even, if she preferred that—was not more than an hour or two's walk away. Perhaps she would give him a cup of tea as he passed. They might meet at church of a Sunday morning, and stroll homeward together. He could leave little presents for the boy, or illustrated papers and magazines for herself, or a basket of fruit, perhaps, got down from Covent Garden. Sister and friend, if so she wished it: he was content. And so he looked forward to meeting Sabina with equanimity and a light heart.

During the morning matters outside mended somewhat; the fog grew gradually thinner; and by the time he issued forth, the sun was actually visible—appearing like a small Hispano-Moresque plate in an atmosphere of opaque milky-white. It was a long way across London to Waterloo Station; when he reached that hollow-resounding place, with its cold platforms and shivering porters, there was even a faint suggestion of blue in the sky; he was now secure of a bright day for his first dip into Surrey.

He had made up his mind that on this occasion he would not seek to see Sabina. He would merely have a

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look round the neighbourhood, to discover whether it would suit his purpose. His own dim recollection of it was that it was pretty flat—heathy commons, ponds, scattered villages, and so forth. But in any case there was more variety a little way farther to the south—by Box Hill and Mickleham Downs; and then again it was atmospheric effects he was aiming at rather than pronounced landscape. Frosty moonlight nights, snow-scenes, wan wintry sunrises, and the like—these were what he was after; he could afford, in this series of studies at least, to dispense with the conventionally picturesque. And if he did happen to meet Sabina on this journey of exploration, of course he would speak to her. She would hardly be surprised. It was a landscape-painter's business to be about the country in all seasons. He would tell her his aims. And she would understand that his choice of this neighbourhood was dictated chiefly by the fact of there being a convenient little hotel at Burford Bridge, which would afford him excellent headquarters.

But still—still—as the train jogged on its way through the wintry English landscape—with its irregular little fields and tall hedges, its dank raw greens and reds, its pale sunshine and vaporous distances—he began to be less convinced that he should meet Sabina in this easy and matter-of-fact fashion. There were some things he could not quite forget. He could not forget how, in former days, when Sabina made her appearance—whether at the top of

the stairs at the Royal Academy, or alighting from her cab in front of his own house, or as he casually encountered her in Kensington High Street—there was a kind of bewilderment caused by the straightforward look of her clear, beautiful, bland eyes. He could not forget the glamour of her presence as she sat beside him at the supper-table, the charm of her smile, the mystic fascination of her voice, and his own desperate anxiety to be kind to her, and to entertain her in every possible way. Things were changed, it is true. Then she was the admired of all—radiant, and beautiful, and queenly; conferring favour by the mere touch of her hand; bringing with her an atmosphere of light and happiness and sunshine whithersoever she went: now she was solitary, and apart from friends, and a widow. And then he remembered—in these rather wistful reveries, as he sat and looked out on the ever-changing wintry landscape—that Monna Giovanna was a widow when at last Federigo won her love. But then Monna Giovanna was rich and had everything to give; whereas Federigo, when he had sacrificed his falcon for her sake, had parted with the last of his possessions. And then again he recalled Janie's often-repeated saying, 'There is but the one way of winning Sabie's love, and that is through her pity.' He was in no promising case, then? In honest truth, he could not compassionate himself about anything. He was in the best of health, with the years still lying lightly on his shoulders; he had won for himself a position as an artist which he

considered quite commensurate with his merits; he was of good descent; he had more money than met his needs; he had lots of friends. He knew of no particular reason why he should be pitied; except, perhaps, that he had the misfortune to be very much in love with a woman—and even in that direction he did not struggle hard with his fate.

'Witstead.'

The sudden sound startled him out of these reveries; and involuntarily and quickly he glanced round the little platform. But there was no one going away by the train; and he was the only person who alighted; when he had given up his ticket and passed through the small building, he found himself alone, with the road lying before him towards the village.

And here he paused, in dire uncertainty, almost in fear. It was one thing to think of Sabina when he was three or four thousand miles away; it was another to find himself almost within a stone's-throw of her, so that any moment he might find himself confronted by her startled eyes. If only he could at once go forward and take her hand and say, 'Dear friend, don't be alarmed. It is true I have come to see you—to be near you. But I will vex you with no importunities. You shall be my sister, if you wish it—my sister and friend; and I will ask you to let me see you occasionally, and to help you in any way that may arise.' But would not these very explanations be embarrassing—nay, impossible? And now he wished he had

gone on to Burford Bridge; and remained there until the arrival of his painting materials. He had not even a note-book and pencil with him to make pretence, supposing he were suddenly to meet Sabina, and have to tell his tale. And what if she were to resent his coming thus unannounced and uninvited? He began to think it would be better for him to avoid Witstead; there would be some other route by which he could make his way to Burford Bridge.

And yet an overpowering fascination of curiosity drew him on, bit by bit, towards the village. He regarded the most trivial things around him with the keenest interest. This road, now—crisp and hard it was in the grip of the frost, and the ruts made by the cart-wheels were gleaming white with ice—this was the road Sabina would come along each time she went to London. And of course she would be quite familiar with all these things—the wintry hedges, the wide stretch of common, with its patches of dark-green gorse, the pond now ruffled into silver by a slight wind from the north. And still he went on, with an eye cast well forward. If only he could see her cottage, then he would go away content. But how was he to make out which of these straggling houses was hers? He met no one, and so could not ask. As he drew nearer, he could see two or three small children playing about; otherwise the main thoroughfare seemed quite deserted; for although there were two heavily-laden wains in front of the Checkers, the drivers had gone inside. Finally, after a

moment's hesitation, he took heart of grace, walked boldly forward, crossed the road, and entered the inn.

He was received by the daughter of the house, a pretty, buxom, blue-eyed little wench, who seemed to regard the tall, bronzed, black-eyed stranger with much and evident favour. For not only did she politely invite him into the bar-parlour, but she offered him a newspaper, and poked up the fire for him; and when she brought him the ale and biscuits and cheese he had ordered (in the meantime she had snatched a moment to look at her hair, and arrange her smart little cuffs), she seemed quite willing to wait and be asked questions, which she answered smilingly and graciously. And this led to a notable discovery.

'Oh yes, it is a very quiet neighbourhood,' she was saying; and then she added, with a little laugh, 'But it wasn't last week. You know we got our man in, sir.'

'No, I didn't know,' he said—though he suspected, from certain damaged placards he had seen, that there had been a county election recently. 'I have been away from England for two or three years, and have just come back.'

'Have you indeed, sir!' she exclaimed, as if that were a very remarkable occurrence.

'And who was the lucky candidate?' he continued.

'Sir Tyrrell Drake, sir.'

'Oh really,' he said, with some surprise. 'Well, he is a good man.'

'He is a very kind gentleman—he is very much liked about here,' she said pleasantly.

'But you don't mean that he is still at Beaver Court?—I thought he had taken it for only a season or two, for the shooting.'

'He has bought the Court, sir. Oh yes, that was about eighteen months ago, I think.'

'Really!' he said; and for a minute or two the amiable young lady's volunteered information about Beaver Court and its connection with local politics received remarkably small attention. His mind was off on a rapid little trip. Of course Sabina would be known to the clergyman of the parish; of course the clergyman would be known to the owner of Beaver Court, which was one of the great houses in the neighbourhood; Lindsay had become very friendly with this Sir Tyrrell Drake through meeting him at more than one shooting-box in Scotland; and so what more simple than to have conveyed to Sabina in this way the information that he was established at Burford Bridge, and that there would be nothing remarkable if she should happen to meet him? She would be prepared. There would be no danger of startling her. Their friendship would be resumed in an easy and natural way; it would be no matter for wonder if he called upon her, and took the little presents for the boy.

When he had paid his shot, and was about to leave, he said to the gracious and friendly handmaiden, 'Do you happen to know a Mrs. Foster who lives about here?'

'Indeed I do, sir,' was the instant answer. 'The poor dear lady is very lonely now; she is a widow now, perhaps you know, sir?'

'Yes,' he said absently. And then he added: 'Is her house in the village, or outside?'

'If you step into the road, I will show you.'

He followed her, and she pointed out to him the cottage, which stood somewhat apart from the rest of the place, with a bit of ground in front, and apparently a larger space of garden behind. He was rather glad that he could go on his way without passing the cottage; but he stood looking at it—until, indeed, he was recalled to his senses by the young lady of the inn saying to him, 'Good-morning, sir, and thank you!'

'Oh, good-morning, and thank you very much!' he said—and therewith she tripped into the hostelry, with just one brief, swift, and perhaps casual glance, from the doorstep, at the handsome stranger who was now walking briskly away southward.

And he was well content that now he knew the actual and veritable house that held Sabina; and he was glad to be in the neighbourhood; and whenever chance brought him that way, he would know the precise spot that his eyes would seek for. Indeed, so well satisfied was he with his morning's work that, as he got farther and farther down into the country, he began to devote his mind to other things, and to have a look about him for possible subjects. To

an ordinary observer there was not much that was promising; for although there was a perfectly cloudless sky overhead, and the pale December sunlight was flooding the land, wintry desolation was too apparent, the woods were leafless, the trees nearer at hand looked black. That is to say, to an ordinary observer the trees might have looked black; but to the trained eye of a landscape-painter there is nothing black in the country — except the rooks; as regarded these very trees, he was noting with delight the golden-green of their stems on the sunward side, and the beautiful deep rose-purple of their spreading masses of branches and twigs. Indeed, for him there was no lack of colour anywhere. There was the ruddy bronze of the fallen beech-leaves; there was the dull yellow of the foliage of the scrub-oak; there was the sparkling green of ivy and laurel, and the heavier green of the firs; the tall hedges were starred with the red or purple-red berries of the hawthorn, the wild-rose, and the yew; here and there the high banks were hanging with the silvery-gray fluff of the wild clematis. Oh, yes, he should have plenty of employment. There were greater things than these to tax his skill. The ever-changing heavens would present him with their slow-moving transformations, from the lonely splendour of the dawn to the mystery of the coming night; the snow and the frost would be his companions; the moonlit woods would have secrets to reveal. And he was especially fortunate in this, that the public were very good to him, and did not grumble

when he would insist on doing his work in his own way. He might be as patient and faithful and minute as he chose—or as elusive and subtle and faintly suggestive—and they did not complain. Doubtless they knew they could get chromo-lithographs elsewhere.

When he got down to Box Hill, he first of all had a look round the neighbourhood, and saw there what—with a little straining of conscience—served to confirm him in his purpose. Then he proceeded to the Burford Bridge Hotel, and managed to secure what seemed to him very snug and comfortable rooms. And finally he ascertained that Sir Tyrrell Drake was then living at Beaver Court; though they could not tell him whether Sir Tyrrell had got through his pheasant-shooting of the year. The fact is, Lindsay, though he had now to say, 'For I must to the greenwood go,' had no thought of going as 'a banished man.' He expected to spend the time very pleasantly in this retreat; and if his work should hold him mainly bound to these more southern regions, still, there were Sundays and other occasional holidays when a little trip northward would afford him relaxation. If only that first meeting were well over! In the meanwhile he walked on to Reading, and took train back to London; anxious to get his preparations made as soon as possible, and himself installed in these new quarters. In a couple of days' time, he thought, he should be established at Burford Bridge.

CHAPTER XXXVII

TOGETHER

Eventually, as it proved, it was the merest chance that threw him in Sabina's way. On the afternoon of his leaving London for the country, when his painting-gear had been packed and put on the top of a hansom, he drove to Victoria Station. The place was busy and thronged; for it wanted but two days to Christmas; and it was with an idle and yet interested curiosity that he stood and watched the holiday-folks while the porter was getting down his things from the cab. At this moment an omnibus was driven up; and about the first person to alight was a tall young woman, dressed simply in black and partially veiled, who was carrying some parcels in her hand. Now any woman who was young and tall attracted his notice; it was a habit he had fallen into; but the moment he set eyes on this black-draped figure, his heart jumped. Nay, as she stepped across the outer platform and entered the ticket-office, his wild conjecture became a certainty—how could he mistake that graceful, easy walk, and the unconsciously proud set of the head? Instantly he followed her—uncertain what to do or

say—determined only not to let her out of his sight. She passed through the crowded ticket-office and went leisurely across the platform towards the bookstall. He caught a side-glimpse of her face—and a thrill of joy and wonder and almost of fear flashed through his frame. Indeed this was Sabina—her very self—pale, it is true—but as beautiful as ever; he might have known it was she by the luxuriant, soft, golden-brown hair, that the small black hat and veil only served partially to conceal.

'Mrs. Foster!' he said rather breathlessly.

She turned sharply and suddenly, with a frightened look on her face; but she recognised him almost at once; and then she gave him her hand in a somewhat hesitating manner.

'How do you do?' she said. 'I heard you had come back to England. I saw Janie this afternoon.'

'I—I am afraid I startled you,' he said.

'It was the strange voice—that was all,' she answered; and now she was speaking with perfect self-composure.

'Let me carry your things for you,' he said.

'No, thank you, they are quite light. Merely some little presents for two or three children I know.'

'Shall I get you your ticket?'

'I have a return, thank you.'

It seemed so extraordinary to be standing here talking to Sabina about these commonplace trifles, just as if he had bade her good-bye yesterday in Kensington Square. And

after that first brief shock of surprise, she appeared to be quite calm and collected; it was he who was rather bewildered and breathless and anxious to talk about a great many things at once. For he remembered Janie's hint. The past was past; and there was an understood compact that it should lie buried and forgotten. It was the things of the present he had to talk about, in this interval of waiting for the train; except, indeed, when Sabina was so kind as to ask him about his travels, or his intentions as regarded the future.

He left her for a moment to look after his luggage; and then these two went down the platform together to the train —a strikingly handsome couple, as one or two of the bystanders appeared to think. The young widow was neatly dressed too; Lindsay, at least, was sure that black became her pale complexion, and her soft-braided, sun-brown hair.

They reached the carriages.

'Good-bye,' she said, in a gentle and friendly way, and she held out her hand.

'But mayn't I come with you?' he said, with evident surprise. 'You go to Witstead, don't you? Well, I am for Burford Bridge. It is the same train.'

'I am going third-class,' she said simply, and then she added, with a smile, 'You know, I have to be very economical nowadays.'

'You always were very economical,' he answered quickly. 'And I am going third-class too. Economy!

You don't know what is expected of us poor artists. I am afraid to walk along the streets with a decent hat on my head.'

'Why?'

'Why? In case any of the art-critics should see me.'

He could not explain at the moment. He had to get his paraphernalia stowed into the farther end of a third-class carriage; and then he asked her to step in; and then he turned to the guard who was coming along.

'Look here, guard, I have a lot of breakable things here that I don't want moved. I suppose you can keep the compartment for us?'

A couple of half-crowns slipped into the guard's hand accompanied this inquiry; the next minute he was seated in the carriage, with the door locked; and he was alone with Sabina. In order to remove any embarrassment, he took up his parable again—lightly, cheerfully, discursively, as if talking to her were the most ordinary and natural thing in the world.

'But it isn't because we are poor that we artists ought to practise economy; oh no; the cry against us is that we are all so wealthy and purse-proud and prosperous. That is why English art is in its decadence. Did you know that English art was in its decadence?'

'I should not have said so—not in landscape, any way,' she added with a touch of flattery.

'But it is. You see, art always is in its decadence,

according to contemporary critics. Very well, then; they have to find a reason for it; and the reason at present is that in England artists are paid too well. They live in comfortable houses; buy *bric à brac;* their wives wear satins and silks; therefore the pampered sons of fortune can't paint. If they cared for their art—if they cared for anything but money and profusion and display—they would go and live the life that Millet lived——'

'J. F. Millet, you mean?' she asked—though she judged by his manner that he was only talking to amuse her.

'Yes. As if Millet painted well simply because he was a singularly unlucky man, and was badly treated; or as if he wouldn't have lived a very different life if he had had the chance. But take the other side of the question. If being paid for one's work—if living in a decent house—or even being received at court—is destructive of the artist's aims, how did Vandyke and Rubens and Velasquez manage to paint at all? You don't suppose that Titian starved, or Raphael, or Michael Angelo. Turner did not die a pauper. Sir Joshua Reynolds painted some passable things, too, though he did not live in a garret. Well, you know, all that is the Grub Street notion of the arts. And yet I am not sure that Grub Street has done so much, after all. Shakespere didn't live there—he bought houses, and land, and tithes. Milton didn't live there; nor Pope, nor Dryden, nor Wordsworth, nor Byron, nor Shelley, nor Scott. Indeed I am not so certain that our critics, who exhort us to live

in a garret, and cultivate literature and painting on a little oatmeal—I am not quite certain that they live there themselves. On the press-day at the Academy, I know I have seen more than one brougham drive into the courtyard of Burlington House. Now that's wrong. That is very wrong. If a man's work goes to the dogs when he gets well paid, how about a critic in a brougham? But perhaps they don't think it matters much what becomes of criticism; and so they may have their houses in Kensington, their boxes at the play, their fine dinner-parties, while we are ordered off to make water-colour drawings at forty francs a piece, or else be denounced as traitors to our art, and hucksters, and panderers to fashion. It's a little hard though, isn't it?'

'They would be quite pleased to see you as you are now,' Sabina said, with a smile, 'in a third-class railway carriage.'

'Yes,' he said. 'I must manage to have it put in the papers—they put everything in the papers nowadays.'

However, there was not much of serious malice in this mock complaint of his; for indeed the critics had been very kind to him, as far as he knew; and sometimes had even gone out of their way, in their usual pessimistic wail, to make of him an especial exception, as one whose work showed undeviating high purpose. It was merely the first subject that had suggested itself on his getting into this third-class carriage; it served its purpose of removing any restraint between Sabina and himself; and by the time he

had completed a whimsical contrast between the lot of a critic in London, living in luxury, frequenting his clubs, gossiping through Private Views, and perhaps even seated at the Royal Academy banquet, and the lot of a poor devil of an artist in the Canadian wilds, with half-frozen fingers cooking his own meals and sleeping at night in a shivering tent,—by the time he had put these two people before her, and sought to enlist her sympathy on behalf of one of them, they were rattling away down into Surrey, with the dusk of the December afternoon stealing gradually over the land.

In his heart he thanked Janie. It was ever so much more satisfactory to be talking about the merits of English portrait-painting than to be offering sham condolences; and Sabina showed that she was not at all shocked by his apparent callousness, for she was most friendly and pleasant towards him. That was until they reached Witstead; there her manner changed. For now the dusk had deepened; and of course he said that he would get out there and escort her home—making his own way to Burford Bridge on foot; and he was a little surprised that she should so earnestly ask him not to think of such a thing.

'Oh, but I must insist,' he said. 'What, do you think I am going to let you walk away alone through the dark?'

'I assure you I am quite used to it,' she pleaded. 'Please don't let me put you about so. Do you know how many miles it is to Burford Bridge?'

'Yes, I know very well. Here, guard!'

'Yes, sir.'

'When you get to Burford Bridge, just give those things to the station-master, will you, and tell him I will send for them this evening.'

'Very well, sir.'

'Of course, when she saw that he was determined, she forbore to protest any further; and she relinquished to him the parcels she was carrying; then they set forth together, along the desolate road and through the ever-deepening and darkening twilight. He did not walk fast—though Sabina was a notable walker, and liked brisk exercise. He wished this solitary way were thrice as long. And it was so strange to find himself alone in the world with her, as it were, in the silence of the night, with one or two stars just becoming faintly visible through the thin mist that lay all around them. Now and again a parcel that he carried would touch her dress. That was being close enough to Sabina. That was not like being some three or four thousand miles away, half-dreaming, over a camp-fire, of England and of a woman's face set round about with an aureole of golden-brown hair, and shining with benignant eyes. And he wondered why Sabina had been so anxious that he should not walk with her from the station. Did she wish him not to see how small the place was in which she now lived? No; that was not like Sabina—who was simplicity itself in such matters. And as if it could matter to him where Sabina lived—in hovel or in palace—so long as she was his friend.

'You will be distributing your presents to-morrow, I suppose?' he said (though the silence and the light sound of her footfall on the frosty road were delightful enough).

'They can hardly be called presents,' she answered simply. 'The fact is, Janie and her husband have sent me down everything that could be imagined for my own little boy; and as I had to be in London I thought I might as well bring some bits of things for a few of the children about. But why to-morrow?'

'You will spend Christmas Day at home?' he said, at a venture.

'Yes, I shall,' she said. 'But you forget—my home is here.'

'I meant London,' he said. 'I thought perhaps you might be going up to your friends—to the Wygrams, for example.'

'No,' she said shortly. 'I am not going anywhere at present. And you—where shall you be?'

He could not help smiling—though she did not see. For well he recognised the old abrupt manner—the straightforward frankness that used to startle him a little bit sometimes. And highly pleased was he to find her placing him on the old friendly footing.

'Oh, I?' he said. 'Well, one or two people have been so kind as to take pity on a forlorn bachelor; and I was thinking of going to the house where there were the most children—for they make the fun of Christmas; but, do you know, I really think I shall stay at Burford Bridge.'

'Christmas in a hotel?' she said. 'Won't you find that very lonely?'

'Loneliness and I have been pretty constant companions since I left England,' said he, 'and we manage to get on very well together. We're on the best of terms, and hardly ever tire of each other. But if I should find Burford Bridge just a trifle too dull on Christmas Day, I may walk over and call on you for a quarter of an hour. You know, I want to make the acquaintance of your little boy.'

She answered neither yes nor no; and it was too dark for him to see by her face how she took his proposal. Presently she said rather slowly, 'I think, if I were you I would accept one of those invitations. It hardly seems English-like to spend Christmas in a hotel. And there must be many of your friends delighted to welcome you after so long an absence.'

'Oh, I think I shall keep to Burford Bridge,' he said cheerfully, 'if I don't put the good people about. I should be a stranger, now, if I went to any one's house. I shall do very well by myself.'

They were arrived at the front gate of the little cottage.

'Well, whether you go up to town or not,' she said, 'I wish you a Merry Christmas.'

He took her hand.

'I wish you a Merry Christmas, and many, many, many happy New Years.'

Perhaps there was just a trace of too much earnestness

in this speech, for she somewhat distantly said, 'Good-night. I am sure your friends must be glad to see you looking so well.'

And then he shut the little gate; and also bade her good-night; and directly afterwards was making off to the southward as fast and as joyfully as he could go—his footsteps sounding sharply on the hard road, a dim mist hanging all around, the Pleiades overhead showing merely as a small faint patch of silver haze, a large planet burning more clearly in the south.

Then there was dinner in the comfortable little hotel; and there were big logs piled on the fire of his sitting-room; and his pipe was lit; and there were visions there—not in the least of a mournful character. His mind was going back over many things—the evenings of former years; and he wondered if she sometimes recalled them too. And most of all he lamented that he had no keep-sake or souvenir of these happy nights, as linking her memory of them with his. The only thing he possessed that was associated with Sabina was the chalice of rock-crystal out of which she had sipped to please him; and he thought he would have that brought down for Christmas Day—not to drink out of, but to grace his solitary table. If only she had given him some small trinket in these far-off days! A rose, even, at Mrs. Mellord's ball: he would have had the leaves embalmed in a small gold casket, that he could have attached to his watch-chain. That was the

night she had come into the hall as if in a cloud of radiant white; that was the night she had gone with him into the half-lit supper-room, with its festoons and beds of roses, and had lain lazily back in her chair, with the one diamond in her necklet flashing from time to time as she breathed. Or perhaps he would have been more fortunate if he had prayed for some token of remembrance on the evening she spent at his own house? She was more than kind and complaisant that night—as they sat at table together. He remembered some verses of a ballad of his own country—of his own county, indeed—

'O dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sat at the wine,
How we changed the napkins frae our necks?
It's no sae lang sin syne.

And yours was gude, and gude enough,
But no sae gude as mine;
For yours was o' the cambrick clean,
But mine o' the silk sae fine.

And dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
As we twa sat at dine;
How we changed the rings frae our fingers,
And I can show thee thine?

And yours was gude, and gude enough,
Yet no sae gude as mine,
For yours was o' the red, red gold,
But mine o' the diamond fine.'

Cambric or silk, gold or diamond, it would have mattered little to him what this trinket might be, if only

Sabina had given it to him, as a pledge of remembrance. And here now was Christmas come—when friendly gifts and souvenirs were permitted according to common custom. From her to him?—that was hardly to be thought of. From him to her?—well that was matter for long and cheerful consideration, as the yellow logs and roots blazed up in tongues of crimson fire, and his pipe was lit again and again, and the slow half-hours crept on.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

'O' BYGANE DAYS AND ME'

EARLY next morning he was off and up to London; and he made straight for Covent Garden, and for a florist's shop there. There were two or three men about the place, and a young lady behind the counter; and naturally he turned to the young lady behind the counter, as likely to be more sympathetic and obliging.

'I want you to make me up a basket of flowers,' said he.

'If you please. About what price?' said the young lady, with amiable eyes.

'Ah, we'll talk about that later on,' he answered. 'You see, I want it arranged according to my own fancy. I am an artist—like yourself; and this time you will let me have my own way about the colours.'

'Oh, certainly, sir—of course. Will you tell me what flowers you would like?' she said politely.

He took a chair, and sat down at the counter; tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and began to draw some lines with his pencil.

'I see you have in the window all the flowers that

would be necessary. Well, then, I want you to take a circular basket—a pretty big one—yes, that will do—and line it with green moss, leaving the moss to be the outside ring—so. Then comes a circle of white hyacinths—say about that breadth proportionately. Then comes a circle of those red tulips—a single line of them. Then comes a broader circle of white camellias. Now for the centre: the centre is to be entirely of heart's-ease—nothing else. Do you understand?'

'Oh yes. I think it will be very pretty,' she was good enough to say.

'I think it will.'

And then, having given her strict injunctions about choosing the freshest and choicest blossoms, and about the careful packing of the basket, he turned to the proprietor of the shop. He wanted a box of fruit made up—as large as one could conveniently carry — the contents, white grapes, black grapes, pine-apples, and the like. Could these two packages be sent by a certain hour to Victoria Station? He would be there to receive them and pay the messenger. When all this had been satisfactorily settled, he bade good-morning to the pleasant-eyed young lady, got into the hansom again, and drove off to his studio at Notting Hill.

As he had left home but the previous day, there were no letters to be answered, nor further instructions to be given to his housekeeper; his only business was to get out

from a cabinet the rock-crystal cup which was the sole souvenir of a certain memorable night. And so, when he had got down to Victoria, and was on his journey back to Burford Bridge, he was bearing with him three packages; one, a basket of flowers for Sabina (surely at such a time she could not refuse so simple a present?); the second, a box of fruit for the little boy (he hoped he had not erred in his selection—but grapes were innocent enough, anyway); and the third, a crystal chalice, set round about with uncut stones, which was to adorn his Christmas dinner-table, and perhaps, in his solitude, act as a magic talisman to call up long bygone scenes (as if it were so difficult for him to summon back the well-remembered evenings on which he and Sabina had been together!)

However, when he got down to Burford Bridge, his conscience began to smite him a little. What was he in this part of the country for? He was a landscape-painter—with his work to do in the world. And if it was as yet useless for him to unstrap his sketching implements, at least he ought to be looking about the neighbourhood for possible subjects. And so, when he had obtained a snack of late luncheon, he went wandering carelessly out and along the road—over the bridge that spans the sluggish Mole.

To tell the truth, things did not look very promising on this short and bleak December afternoon; but, by turning his back on the now westering sun, he managed to get

what colour was going. There, for example, was a strip of golden-yellow fence; over that the green stems of some leafless trees; and then, behind and above those trees, the dusky height of Box Hill, mostly of a misty indigo-blue, with touches of russet and dark-green here and there, and here and there a series of pinky-gray scaurs. He walked on. There was a suggestion in some coldly-white horses in a dank green field, with a coppery sun just sinking behind a hill—the hill in pale blue shadow. Again he walked on. Somehow his work did not seem to interest him much this afternoon. It was Christmas time, after all. There was an unsettling sense of hope and elation in the air. He wondered if to-morrow would be fine and clear and bright; he was going to take Sabina her flowers. All over England that afternoon families were being brought together—some of the members from distant places enough; the Christmas *Schwärmerei* was already being blown into flame; he thought of the many, many happy households. Yes; and of the household of the young widow—who would be solitary enough to-night in that little cottage. But to-morrow? She might be kind to her one visitor? She could hardly refuse the flowers.

It is a most remarkable circumstance that on this same afternoon, just as the gases were being lit, Santa Claus made his appearance in the streets of the small town of Dorking, in actual and bodily shape, though in a guise not ordinarily attributed to him. The story was told by a very consider-

able number of children; and as on all the substantial points it was identical, it may safely be credited. They said that as they were looking into this or that newly-lit shop-window, some one from behind tapped them on the shoulder; and that, turning, they saw a tall man—some of them called him a gentleman, but that is hardly the phrase to apply to Santa Claus—brown-faced and black-eyed, who said, 'Go in and buy something,' and put in the hand of each of them a coin. In the surprise that followed the stranger vanished; but there was the undoubted white thing—apparently a shilling—in the palm of their hand. It appeared that most of them were for going home to ask their people if it was real; but that here and there a youngster more intrepid than the rest adventured into this or that shop and asked for a pennyworth of something; and not only came out again to show his companions his purchase, but could produce an obvious and unmistakable elevenpence of change to convince the most hesitating mind. Meanwhile, what had become of Santa Claus? Why, he had gone into the White Horse Hotel, and was drinking a cup of tea in the bar, and asking the landlord where and when was the next meet of foxhounds in that neighbourhood; for he said he had been away from England for some little time; and now that he had come back, he thought there was nothing in the old country he could see more English-looking and picturesque and inspiriting than a run with the foxhounds on a clear December day.

Lindsay's hope for the morrow was not belied. A fairer Christmas dawn never widened up and over the county of Surrey; and already he was on the top of Box Hill, whither he had climbed before breakfast, despite the clammy and slippery and difficult chalk. The red sun rose behind heavy cloud-banks of saffron-brown, lying low along the horizon; but over these the eastern heavens were of a clear and lambent lemon-yellow, paling into a pearly-gray. And there was a kind of rejoicing in the soul in looking abroad over the wide landscape, with its fields, and hedges, and farmsteads, and church-spires, and here and there a tuft of blue smoke rising into the still air. Well he knew what was happening in those scattered country houses, half-hidden among the leafless trees. The children were examining with delight and awe the mysterious fairy packages that had been left for them overnight at the nursery door; the young folk were careering down the stairs, to search the pile of cards and letters on the hall-table; the older people were still lying half-dozing and half-dreaming of former days; perhaps somewhere—among the laurel-bushes—or by the garden gate—there was a lover regarding a high window, and ready with a kiss to be thrown upward from eager finger-tips. '*Wæs-heil!*' this solitary spectator could have called to the wide, awakening land. For he was glad to be at home again, to be in his own country once more.

The first train after morning church took him to Witstead; then he walked along the hard, wintry road towards

the village, carrying the two packages with him. He was hardly apprehensive as to how she should receive him; this was the season for the meeting of friends; it was the universal custom to offer little gifts at such a time; she would take from him so simple a thing as a basket of flowers.

He stopped at the little gate and rang the bell: the maid came to the door.

'Is Mrs. Foster at home?' he said—not anxiously.

'Yes, sir.'

'Can I see her for a moment or two?'

'Step inside, sir, and I'll ask. What name, sir?'

The next moment he had followed the little maid into the house, and was in Sabina's parlour. He put the fruit and flowers on the table—removing the wrappers. And then he glanced about the place.

It was a strange kind of drawing-room for the daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra to have. Doubtless there were many small neatnesses here and there—which he attributed to Sabina's own hand; but the furniture was cheap and showy; the pretentious British upholsterer had been allowed to do his worst. For a moment he thought of what a labour of love it would be if he were to begin the construction and beautifying of a house—somewhere on Campden Hill, for choice—with some remote hope of her one day entering it as mistress. And while the builder was at work, he would be away abroad—at Tunis, at Cairo, at

Smyrna—ransacking the bazaars for rugs, and hangings, and tiles, and brass-work, and what not, for the proper decoration of her home. He knew of some sixteenth-century silk embroideries he had seen in Venice—there was an alabaster chimney-piece he had nearly brought home from Genoa, though it would have been something in the nature of a white elephant——

'Please, sir,' said the little maid at the door, 'missis's compliments, and she will be down in a moment.'

Then she went away; but she could only have gone into the neighbouring apartment, for he could distinctly hear her humming an air that was strangely familiar to him. And then he remembered. Why, this was the familiar old air with which his mother had many and many a time hushed him to sleep. And where had this small maid picked it up? From her mistress? Had Sabina, then, heard some Scotch mother sing—

'O can ye sew cushions,
And can ye sew sheets?'

Now that he thought of it, he was not quite sure that Janie had not mentioned it in one of her letters.

The door opened, and Sabina appeared. She seemed pale, reserved, and serious beyond her wont; she was leading her little boy by the hand.

'You wished to see my little boy? Here he is.'

The child was chiefly occupied with a performing monkey in oxidised silver, one of Janie's presents; but he came

forward frankly enough. At the same time, and involuntarily, she glanced towards the table.

'I have brought you a few flowers,' said he lightly, 'and also some fruit for this youngster, if it is permitted to him. It will be better for him than sweets, anyway.'

'Oh, thank you very much,' Sabina said; and she went to the table, and bent down her head over the flowers.

Lindsay drew the little fellow towards him: who could doubt that these clear brown eyes were unmistakably Sabina's eyes?

'What is your name?'

'Harry,' the child said, still busy with the monkey.

And Lindsay, looking at those eyes, said to himself, 'Well, my little chap, of course you can't know that in the years to come Carnryan in Galloway will be yours. And you will have to grow up to be a brave man—strong, and honourable, and generous to women—and fit to be the owner of the old tower of Carnryan.'

Sabina came back.

'So you preferred to stay down in the country?' she said.

'Yes.'

'It will be a lonely Christmas evening for you.'

He looked up suddenly, and appealed to her eyes. Was she going to ask him to share her solitude, if only for the briefest time, say for an hour, perhaps, or a couple of hours, as the afternoon faded away to dusk, and the lamps were lit? It seemed so natural a thing! These two isolated

creatures, living near to each other; and this being Christmas time, when people are drawn together! But she noticed that look, and instantly her manner became more reserved than ever.

'Harry,' she said quickly, 'you have put that thing wrong again. Come here, and I will set it right for you.'

He knew that he had made a mistake; yet even this momentary slip could not account for the strange coldness, and distance, and reticence of her manner towards him, when he began to talk to her. It was forced on him only too clearly that his presence was an embarrassment to her; when she spoke it was in a formally reserved and courteous way—she who had always been so frank and direct and straightforward. Nevertheless, the charm of the beautiful eyes, the calm forehead, and the proud, sweet mouth—the serious grace and dignity of her every movement and look—the nameless fascination that merely being near her threw over him—kept him there in spite of himself; and also perhaps there was added some remembrance of Sabina's greater kindness to him in the bygone days.

At length he rose to go; and she accompanied him to the door. Then, when she had bade him good-bye—and, indeed, when he was half-way across the little patch of garden—she seemed to relent for a moment.

'Mr. Lindsay!' she said.

He turned.

'I'm afraid I did not half thank you for bringing the

fruit to the little boy,' she said, in a hesitating way. 'I—I see so few visitors—don't think me ungrateful——'

'Oh, that is all right,' he said good-naturedly. 'Tell him to look alive and grow up, and I'll buy him a pony.'

Then he bade her farewell again, and went on his way. And if he was a little comforted by that brief token of compunction (if so it might be considered), he was none the less surprised that Sabina should treat him in so cold a fashion. He had been scrupulous in offering her nothing but the merest friendship. To give her a basket of flowers on Christmas Day was surely no great thing. Why, she had been far more complaisant on their coming down together in the train. And he could not for a moment imagine that Sabina's embarrassment and reserve was owing to her having to receive him in that commonly-furnished room.

He walked away over the hard-frosted country, and round by Headley Hill and Mickleham Downs; and when he got back to Burford Bridge, he found it was almost time for dinner. Then he brought forth the precious cup of rock-crystal, and placed it among the holly-berries with which the good people of the inn had decorated the table. It looked very well there. It would give an air of richness and magnificence to the frugal little banquet. And he thought that whatever became of his other valuables and possessions (as to which he was rather careless, for he had discovered in various distant lands that it was easy to get on without them) this treasure at least should remain his.

It would be to him as the golden goblet of the King of Thule. *'Den Becher nicht zugleich.'*

But as he sat at his solitary Christmas dinner, that jewel-studded talisman proved to be, as often it had proved before, an awakener of memories; and all the more he wondered why Sabina, who had been so gracious to him in former days, should be so unfriendly now. Again and again the lines came into his head—

'O dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sat at the wine,
We changed our napkins frae our necks?
It's no sae lang sin syne.'

Surely it was not so long since then?—and about her having then singled him out for very especial favour there could not be the slightest doubt. And if she could not recall those days, at least he could—to the minutest details. He could remember how more than once, at Mrs. Wygram's, she had left the group who were surrounding her, and crossed the room to talk to him alone. At Mrs. Mellord's ball, at the Private View of the Academy, at the little party in his own house, and on other occasions, she seemed to expect him to devote himself entirely to her, which undoubtedly he had done. And now her coldness of manner, her studied reticence, not only showed that she had forgotten how in all things he had tried to please her, and amuse her, and entertain her—how he had paid her every attention that was possible in the circumstances—but also

they seemed to say that for the future she would rather have none of his acquaintance.

He was rather glad to have done with this solitary dinner; and then he lit his pipe, and drew in the comfortable easy-chair to that fire of briskly-blazing logs.

Forthwith (so varying are the moods of men) he began to denounce himself as the most ungrateful scoundrel that ever breathed. What?—was it the very kindness of Sabina towards him in the past that was to be made a weapon of reproach against her now? She had given him everything that the most exacting friendship could demand—so much so that outsiders mistook the relations between them altogether; and these were his thanks! And was it not natural that she should be a little embarrassed by this first and perhaps unexpected visit of his? She had not got accustomed to the notion of his being, as it were, a next-door neighbour. Then she was a young widow, living alone; and people were always ready to talk. As for his unspoken suggestion that he should remain and share her Christmas dinner with her, perhaps that was really of a nature to startle her? And clearly—when he was coming away—she had begun to regret her excessive reserve; and wished to part friends. Things had come to a strange crisis indeed if he could cherish any grudge against Sabina.

No; he would set about his work now, and get on with that; and she would become familiar with the notion of his

being in the neighbourhood; and by degrees they might establish the coveted and beautiful relationship of old, if nothing more. And so he relit his pipe, and piled on more logs and roots; and there grew up before his eyes a picture of Sabina standing on the doorstep, laughing and radiant and happy-eyed, while he led away the youthful Harry from the garden-gate—on the back of a Shetland pony.

CHAPTER XXXIX

NEIGHBOURS

After that day he set resolutely to work; and very cold work it was. But he had long been used to out-of-door exposure; he had a virile physique; and then some unknown friend—whose motive for withholding his name was beyond conjecture—had sent him a kid-leather coat such as is worn in early spring by salmon-fishers in Norway, and there was much warmth and satisfaction in this garment. Nor was he without occasional company. The two daughters of Sir Tyrrell Drake had a couple of young lady friends staying with them at Beaver Court; and the whole four of these girls were, or professed to be, more or less of amateur artists, and keenly interested in painting. It was remarkable how often they had occasion to drive round by Burford Bridge; and if Mr. Lindsay was anywhere visible, they would give the reins to the groom, and would come and form a semicircle round the artist and his easel, devoting themselves chiefly to compliment, but sometimes venturing to ask how this or that was done. Lindsay was in no wise disconcerted by the presence of these friendly

critics; he was too well used to the bovine gaze of gaping rustics; but he had to inform them that his studies were mostly memoranda for his own subsequent use, and not at all fitted to be set up as exemplars for innocent and aspiring minds. For the rest, he might have dined every night in the week at Beaver Court; and once or twice he did go over, begging to be excused for his morning dress; but for the most part he liked to be alone with his sketches in the evenings, for there was a good deal of consideration to be done indoors.

However, a landscape-painter, no matter how busy he may be, has always plenty of time for thinking over things; and Lindsay, sitting at his easel on those chill January mornings, began to wonder whether he had ever really understood Sabina. Perhaps the glamour of her appearance, her actual physical beauty, had blinded him? If he had been asked to name what he considered her most marked characteristic, he would have said an extraordinarily frank and ready generosity of disposition. But this Sabina was cold, reticent, distrustful, embarrassed, and at times betraying more than a trace of nervous anxiety. Was it, then, that all women were a mystery: inconsistent, perverse, whimsical, unstable as water? The second time that he went over to Beaver Court, he went with a definite purpose. 'I am going to try to find out what women really are,' he said to himself. But those four light-hearted, merry, wholesome-cheeked English girls did not appear to invite

psychological study. Probably they would have called it 'stuff.' They were very kind to him; they played and sang for him; he played and sang for them; and with the assistance of two brothers home from school they had a little romp of 'Sir Roger de Coverley.' One of the girls, indeed, was a tiny and winsome wench of seventeen or eighteen, with soft, kittenish ways, and large, appealing eyes. He suspected that those eyes knew a trifle more than they pretended to know; and that the owner of them, in a quiet corner, might reveal a far from slight acquaintance with the fine art of flirtation. But what of that? They were all of them as school-children to him. They did not interest him. They were merry, and very good-natured, and frank; and they plagued his life out to come to some approaching ball; and they trooped down into the study, and remained there talking, and laughing, and teasing, while he had a final cigar with Sir Tyrrell. Indeed, they were in every way most kind and friendly towards him. But they could not tell him anything about Sabina, who seemed to belong to a different world.

On his rare visits to London he was in the habit of making Witstead his station, just in case he might casually meet her in going or coming. And at last that happened. He had spent the night in town, and was returning to his work on the following morning. He had passed through the little village without seeing any sign of her; and was walking briskly on, trying to forget the renewed disappoint-

ment, when, at some considerable distance ahead of him, he suddenly caught sight of her. He recognised the tall and graceful figure at a glance; all the more that her arm was uplifted and her head thrown back, for apparently she was gathering something from a high hedge that ended a coppice coming right up to the road. On the pathway was a perambulator; but the small Harry was by her side, kneeling at the hedge roots, and no doubt imitating his mother's occupation. As he drew nearer, he heard that she was singing to the child; nearer still, and he could make out the old familiar air; but it was very lightly and cheerfully that she made her complaint—

'The wild wind is ravin',
Thy minnie's heart's sair,
The wild wind is ravin',
And ye dinna care,'

—if that was what she was saying to him. When Lindsay had got quite close to her, she did not turn to see who this was; she merely ceased her singing until the stranger should go by; and then she continued her efforts to get at certain feathery sprays of the wild clematis that were just beyond her reach.

'Let me get them for you,' he said.

She turned quickly; was it ever to be his fate to startle her on their meeting?

'Oh, how do you do, Mr. Lindsay? No, thank you. I think I can manage.'

Of course he saw that she could not manage ; and without further parleying he pulled down the slender branches for her, and she took what she wanted. Then they spoke a little about the weather, and the hardships of the poor. Then she asked him how he was getting along at Burford Bridge.

'Isn't it rather unusual for an artist to be painting out of-doors in weather like this?'

'That makes it all the better worth doing.'

'Don't your fingers get benumbed?'

'Sometimes I have to give up and stamp about. But I can bear cold pretty well.'

'Are you going to take the drawings to America when you have finished them all?'

'No ; I think I shall exhibit them in London.'

'I was told you made a great reputation in America.'

'They were very kind to me over there. And of course an artist's work has to be shown before they can know anything about him. One copy of a book is just as good as another ; but the painter has to show his own original work.'

'And you are not going back to America?' she said rather absently.

'No, I think not—not at present—I have not even thought of it.'

By this time she had put the bits of holly and the red berries and the sprays of old-man's-beard into the perambulator.

'Come along, Harry,' she said; 'you will have to walk all the way back, you see. Good-morning, Mr. Lindsay!'

So she left him; and he walked on, leaden-hearted enough. He wished he had not seen her. Perhaps he ought to try to see her no more. Surely it would be better for him to light his pipe in front of the fire of an evening, and conjure up the beautiful, bland-eyed Sabina that he used to know, who was so frankly generous in her friendliness towards himself, who was the bepetted and be-praised and beloved of all who knew her. This coldly reticent woman here bore herself with an absolutely defiant ostentation of indifference. She seemed to wonder that he did not return to America. Was she anxious that he should return? No; she was too indifferent to be anxious.

But as he walked up and down the room that night, or stood before the fire and roused the blazing roots with his heel, he fell to having juster and gentler thoughts of Sabina.

'There is something that I don't understand,' he said to himself. 'There must be some explanation of such an extraordinary change of manner; and until I discover what it is, I am not going to quarrel with her. Nor will I allow her to quarrel with me. I have given her no cause of offence that I can think of. Whatever comes of it, I must see her, and insist on her speaking out, clear and plain. She used to be able to do that, in those former days, without any pleading at all.'

He thought over the matter for two or three days; and then one morning, when he rose to find a chill east wind (that pest of the landscape-painter) filling heaven and earth with a barely perceptible but perfectly hopeless mist, he thought he might as well walk over to Witstead and have this matter out with Sabina. He arrived there about eleven o'clock. The small maidservant who opened the door looked frightened.

'Yes, sir, missis is at home; but you can't see her. There's illness in the house.'

'Who is ill?' he said, quickly.

'The little boy, sir. And it's fever—scarlet fever.'

She made bold to appeal to him about her own trouble.

'And I'm sure I don't want to leave, sir,' the girl said, looking up to him with timid eyes.

'Why should you leave?'

'Mother wants me to. Mother's afraid.'

'Why, you are not going to play the coward at such a time?'

'I'm sure I don't want to go—missis has been so good to me. This is my fourth place; but I've never had a missis like her before.'

'Well, I am going upstairs to see her——'

'Oh, if you please not, sir—it's dreadfully infectious—I was not to allow any one to go up,' the little maid protested.

'Oh, nonsense,' he said quite gently to her. 'Don't

you be so frightened as that. I am going up to tell your mistress that you couldn't think of leaving.'

He went upstairs. The carpet had been stripped from the landing; his footfall sounded sharp. From the top of one of the doors there were suspended heavy folds of calico soaked in carbolic acid; he guessed that that was the room; and, removing the curtain an inch or two, he knocked lightly. In a minute or so Sabina appeared.

She did not seem so agitated as he had expected; perhaps it was the sense of danger that had strung her nerves. Nor did she seem surprised at finding him there; while he on his part did not stay to make any apology for his intrusion.

'This is a very bad business,' he said. 'I hope it will turn out to be a mild form of the fever.'

'The doctor seems to think that likely,' she said, with apparent calmness. 'There have been two or three cases in the neighbourhood, and none of them of the most serious kind.'

'Oh, then you may fairly hope for the best,' he said. 'But it will be a terrible imprisonment for you.'

'I shall not grudge it. My boy will have a faithful nurse, I think. And very glad I am now that I served six months in the hospital; I should be terrified if I did not know exactly what to do; I should be afraid of making some dreadful mistake.'

'I wish you could suggest some way in which I could be of assistance to you,' he said.

'Would you mind sending a note to Janie, and explaining to her why I cannot write to her?'

'Oh yes,' he said very eagerly, and very much rejoiced to have Sabina talking to him in this simple, frank, direct way, 'I will do so at once. But I mean that you must promise to consider me entirely at your service—at any hour—for any length of time——'

'Thank you, I think we shall do very well,' Sabina said; but then she added, 'Unless the little girl Elizabeth were to leave. Then—I—should be rather helpless.'

Even in the dusk behind those heavy folds he could see the quick nervous tremor that passed across her lips.

'Oh, that's all right,' he said cheerfully. 'That's all right. You needn't bother about that. The little girl isn't going to leave; but if she wishes to leave, there's no harm done. You see, I am on my way to London just now; and in the afternoon I am going to bring my housekeeper down. She will be no inconvenience to you—she will get a bed over the way at the Checkers. Then in the daytime she will come over here and look after things; or if the girl chooses to go, then she will step into her place. It is the simplest matter in the world.'

'You are very kind,' Sabina said, in rather a low voice.

'Then as to yourself. Of course you cannot be the sole nurse—unless you want to knock yourself up at the very outset. As soon as I get up to London I will go to one

of those institutions and send down a trained nurse. I daresay she might be down to-night.'

'Oh no, pray don't!' she said. 'Indeed I can do the nursing myself——'

'Day and night?—why, it is impossible!' he exclaimed.

'I have a great deal of endurance. And then the expense of having one of those trained nurses, perhaps for a long time, would be so great—really I can get on by myself.'

He had foreseen this question of expenditure.

'As to the cost of having a trained nurse down, or any other cost that may be necessary, you will have nothing to do with that. That is my affair——'

'Mr. Lindsay——' she was going to protest; but he stopped her with a gentleness that was firm as well.

'Do you think you have any right to utter a word of objection? You have no right. The care you have for your child must keep you silent. Besides, I claim the privilege from our old-standing friendship. You have not been so friendly with me of late—I do not know why. I came over this morning to ask; I thought if there was a misunderstanding, it might be removed. But all that is nothing now. It does not need to be spoken of. No; I claim from past days the right to act as your friend; and you will not object to anything I do—you cannot object if you think why it is done.'

Her eyelids had been growing moist; two great tears rolled down her cheeks. She quickly brushed them aside.

'How many rooms have you in there—one or two?' he asked.

She could not answer for a moment; then she said, 'One room and a dressing-room. It is very convenient; I can shut the door behind me when I come out like this.'

'Then the dressing-room will do for the nurse. Well, I must be off now; I will see you again in the evening. And don't you think of making one word more of protest; and don't have any anxiety—the house will be managed for you all right. There's another thing, mind you keep yourself up; eat and drink well, for that is the best safeguard against catching infection. And fancy what the outlook for your little boy would be if you fell ill yourself. Well, good bye just now!'

She called him back, and he pretended not to see that she was struggling with an emotion which she could not conceal.

'I—I must not offer you my hand,' she said, in rather a shaky voice, 'and—and I cannot tell you how I thank you; but some day I will——'

'Oh, it is nothing; we are neighbours, you know,' he said lightly, and away he went.

He strode rapidly off to the railway-station, armed with these self-imposed duties, and glad enough to be able to do so much for Sabina. Nay, he would have gone rejoicing 'as a strong man to run a race' but for recurring thoughts

of the sick little lad lying in that lonely chamber. Well, what could be done for him should.

Arrived in London, he forthwith arranged about the trained nurse being sent down that evening; then he drove out to Notting Hill and told his housekeeper what he wanted of her, and gave her all the necessary instructions; and then he went along to Janie, with his brief and troubled story.

'And I want you to do me a good turn,' he said to her. 'I think you told me that Sabina took no wine—for economy's sake, I suppose. Now she must. But she won't take it if it isn't there; I mean she won't send for it. Well, I have a hansom outside; will you drive along with me to my wine-merchants, and yourself order some wines, and give her address, and write a note in the office telling her that they are a New Year's present or something of the sort, and insisting on her using the wine, if she means to keep well during this trouble? Of course it will go down to my account.'

'To your account? But what would Phil say if he heard of such a thing?' Janie exclaimed.

'He need not hear of such a thing,' said the tempter.

'Oh yes, I should have to tell him,' the honest Janie rejoined. 'However, Sabie must not be allowed to suffer. I will tell you what I will do. I will go along and order the wine and send it to her and write to her, and then you and Phil can fight as to who is to pay for it.'

'Excellent, most excellent! Come along!' he said at once. And they went out, and he put her into the hansom and drove off towards Piccadilly.

In the wine-merchant's office Janie's choosing was pretty much of a farce; and at last she protested.

'Mr. Lindsay, if you order such expensive wines, Sabie will know quite well that it wasn't I who sent them.'

'How will she know? By the quality of them? Not likely: she is a woman.'

'Then if she doesn't know the quality, why send her such wines?' Janie asked.

'Because I don't want her poisoned.'

This business over, he got a four-wheeler to convey Janie home, reserving the hansom to take him down to Victoria.

'Remember,' he said, 'that though she may not write to you, you may write as much as you like to her. And you may send her magazines, and illustrated things, and so forth, if you have them to spare; but I will take care that she has plenty of these.'

'If Sabie only knew,' said Janie, looking at him with kind eyes, 'she has one good friend.'

'Only one?' he said with a smile. 'I thought you had a little liking for her. Well, never mind. By the way, if you do go and tell this story about the wine to Master Phil, just ask him to mind his own business. I won't be interfered with. Good-bye!'

'Good-bye! Give my love to Sabie, and say I shall be down to see her in a day or two.'

So she drove away; and he made forthwith for Victoria Station, not ill-satisfied so far with his day's work.

CHAPTER XL

IN TIME OF NEED

All was going well; and it was with a cheerful equanimity he set about making matters as easy as might be for the anxious mother. From the very outset he had presumed to exercise a certain authority over her; he found he could get along better that way; he did as he chose, without waiting for her permission. One afternoon she said to him: 'Mr. Lindsay, do you think you could get a man from the village—I mean, do you think it would be fair to ask any one to come into the room——'

'To do what?' he said.

'I can't help thinking that one of the windows is not quite close up at the top; and I am afraid of the smallest draught. Both the nurse and I have tried to move the top sash, but we can't. Would it be fair to ask a man from the village to try?'

For answer he pushed aside the heavy and saturated curtains, and went by her into the sick-room.

'Which one is it?' he asked.

She protested; but he took no heed of her protest.

'I am not going anywhere where there are children,' he said briefly.

'But yourself?'

'I am not much afraid of that. Which sash is it?'

She showed him; and with little trouble the window was securely jammed up and fastened.

Then he had to dismiss the small servant-maid Elizabeth. Her mother came bothering about the place, with idiotic precautions and whining fears; at last he told her to take her daughter away with her. Then he installed his own housekeeper, who forthwith got down from London a relative of hers to help her with the cooking. These dispositions being made, there remained for him only to cudgel his brains as to what he could send for to solace Sabina's imprisonment—books, magazines, reading-lamps, fruit, flowers, big flasks of Eau-de-Cologne—everything he could think of, and everything of the best. He had no need to fear the ingratitude shown by the Lady Greensleeves to her lover. He asked only for friendship; and he got it. When a summons brought Sabina to the door, and when she pulled aside the curtains a little way, her face would light up when she found that it was he who was on the landing. The embarrassed reticence that had puzzled him so much was almost entirely gone. She was glad to see him; she was very grateful for all he was doing for her; and she strove to show her sense of his kindness in her manner towards him. Nor was he ill to please—

when it was Sabina who stood before him, talking to him, her eyes gentle and well-wishing as in the olden days.

The way of his life at this time was as follows: All the morning and mid-day he was at work at Burford Bridge. Then, as the dusk of the afternoon came on, he would take train to Witstead, and walk to Wayside Cottage, where he had to hear reports, open parcels, and the like. His recompense for that trouble was a protracted chat with Sabina, she standing half-hidden by the curtains, he leaning against the balustrade at the top of the stair. Thereafter he would set out for Burford Bridge by road. For about this time in the evenings there was now shining in the southern heavens a crescent moon, daily gaining in size and brilliancy, and over that there was a large silver-clear planet—a celestial cup and ball, as it were—and he was contemplating a series of drawings of moonlit skies. He had tried one before; his method being to have all his materials ready within doors; then to go out and get as accurate a mental record of appearances as he could obtain; and then to go quickly in and place these impressions, as nearly as he could, on paper. The critics were facetious, of course; some of them indignant. They declared that he made the moon ridiculously small; that he must have been looking at it through the wrong end of a telescope. They asked him where he found the little touches of yellow round the edges of the silver-gray clouds. They disputed

the rainbow-hues of his lunar halo. They suggested colour-blindness when he painted a highway, on a night of full moon, of a purple-gray with a faint russet hue interfused. But he did not pay much heed to these amateur observers or non-observers. He was too much concerned about getting his work done; and he chose to do that in his own way. They might call him perverse, pig-headed, obtuse; they might call his drawings capricious, whimsical, meretricious; somehow he did not mind. If they did not like his drawings, they could leave them; they were not bound to buy them unless they wished. And, as a matter of fact, they did not buy them; but the public did; and many of his fellow-artists did. Now when one painter goes the length of buying another painter's work—of actually buying it—that is the extremest form of praise.

The fever declaring itself to be of a mild form, and all things going on favourably, those little conversations between Sabina and Walter Lindsay were of a quite cheerful cast; and she had become very frank with him—except now and again, when she seemed to recollect herself, and to throw a reserve over her manner in a way that puzzled him. Ordinarily, however, she was most friendly; and showed no hesitation about asking him to do anything for her; once, indeed, she was nearly going beyond the bounds of discretion.

'Mr. Lindsay,' she said, recalling him as he was about to leave, 'I forgot something. I had a letter from my

father this morning. Would you mind sending him a note saying why it is I cannot answer it?'

'Won't that look rather odd?' he said. 'I don't suppose Sir Anthony ever heard of me.'

'Never heard of you? Why, he has two of your landscapes in the drawing-room.'

'And who advised him to buy them?' he asked, with a sudden and vague hope.

'I wish I could say I did,' she answered honestly. 'But it was Lady Zembra did. And I am certain both of them know that you know me.'

'I am afraid Sir Anthony would be a little surprised to get such a note from me——'

'Oh, never mind, then,' she said promptly; 'Janie is coming down to-morrow—she will write for me.'

And yet he did not like to refuse to do Sabina a service.

'If you wish, I will send him word—as from an outsider—that the little boy is ill; and then he will come down and see you himself.'

'Papa come down here—to a house where there is fever?' she said, with a smile. 'It's little you know him. He would think you had gone mad if you suggested such a thing. He would tell you that there is nothing in the world more wicked and foolish than running unnecessary risks. Why, it was his fear of infection that made him turn me out of the house. And if he *were* to come down, I know how I should be lectured. Oh, shouldn't I catch

it! "I told you so. I warned you what would happen if you wouldn't give up going to those slums. Here is your own child ill now!"'

'But there are no slums in Witstead?'

'Oh, that doesn't matter,' Sabina said cheerfully. 'It would be enough that I used to visit slums years ago. However, I think you are right; probably papa would be surprised. Janie will write when she comes to-morrow. And in the meantime I must consider how I am to thank her for sending me all that wine.'

'That is a simple matter, at all events.'

'How?'

'You have only to tell her that you have been using some of it. Do you know,' he continued—for it was most astonishing how, on one pretext or another, he would keep lingering on that dusky landing, while the beautiful silver crescent of the moon, far away in the southern skies, was shining for him in vain, and slowly sailing onwards to the west—'that I can never quite make out why it is that Janie is so impressive a person. When you come to think of it, there is nothing about her of the kind that ordinarily impresses people. She is not beautiful—the honest truth is that she is rather plain; she hasn't a grand manner; she is neither brilliant, nor sarcastic, nor audacious in any way whatever; she has but little in the way of flocks and herds —and her jewels would be despised by a grocer's wife. She ought to be an insignificant kind of creature —one you

would pass by without notice and forget. But she isn't anything of the kind to those who know her. She is a very decided personality. There is some curious distinction about her that I can't quite make out—you say to yourself, well, this plain little woman has something about her that one is forced to admire, and almost to reverence. She is not like every one else; there is a certain distinction and nobility about her somehow —— Spenser's "Regard of Honour and Mild Modesty" sometimes occurs to me—but, whatever it is, I know that in my little world Janie is a very distinct and important personality.'

'But isn't it simple enough?' Sabina said, in her bland way. 'Every one can see that Janie is a true, honest, unselfish, warm-hearted woman. What more?'

'Oh, but you can say that about lots of women,' he answered, in a dissatisfied kind of fashion, 'who have hardly any distinctive character at all—who don't interest you, in short. No; there is something about Janie that belongs definitely to herself.'

'At all events,' said Sabina, with a smile, 'it has not caused you to fall out. You are still friends, I hope?'

Shortly after that he was leisurely making his way south, under the clear dark skies, along a hard and ghostly gray highway, and through an almost silent land. He was absently thinking of many things; and not at all paying the attention that was due to the soft violet hues of the southern heavens, and to the crescent moon that seemed to

have a touch of gold over its silver clearness. And if that riddle about Janie's distinctive character was still present to him, any third person could have answered it for him in a moment. Janie had many excellent qualities, no doubt; but that which obviously gave her value and importance and dignity in his eyes—that which made her lovable in a kind of way—was her devoted and loyal and unwavering affection for Sabina. He forgot that Janie was rather plain-featured when he saw her eyes grow kind at the very mention of Sabina's name.

Janie came down the next day, and was mightily astonished to find Walter Lindsay's housekeeper in charge, for she had not heard of the most recent arrangements. Then she went upstairs—a little tremulous, perhaps—not knowing how Sabina was bearing her trouble. But the first glance she got of her friend reassured her.

'Sometimes,' Sabina said, when the first inquiries were over, 'sometimes I almost think it is like playing at having illness in the house—everything is made so easy and pleasant for us. It is not like a sick-room at all. If I could only show you——'

'Why not?' Janie said, and she made a step forward.

Sabina held up her hand.

'No, I will not allow it. It is not fair to other people. Mr. Lindsay did come in—to shut a window for us; but that was none of my doing; he did not wait for permission. But really if you saw how luxurious we are, Janie—the

stoves we have, and screens, and reading-lamps, and toys lying about the bed, and little baskets of flowers above the mantelpiece—you would say that it was nursing made easy. Mr. Lindsay seems to think that I am greatly to be pitied because I shall be shut up in these two little rooms for some weeks to come. It's little he knows what some people have to suffer when sickness comes into their poor home. But you and I know, Janie.'

'Are you quarrelling with him because he is sorry for you?' Janie asked, reproachfully.

'Quarrelling? No. That is not likely. His kindness and thoughtfulness have just been beyond everything. Why, I cannot imagine how he came to think of so many things —what experience can he have had of what is serviceable in a sick-room? Well, no matter; all I know is that I shall never forget his goodness to me—never, never, never.'

'That is spoken more like yourself, Sabie,' her friend said; and then she added insidiously, 'I suppose he comes over from Burford Bridge now and again?'

'Every afternoon almost, when his work is finished. He was here yesterday—and was speaking about you, by the way. He said some very pretty things about you.'

'Oh well, I don't care who knows what my opinion of him is,' Janie made answer boldly.

'Of course you don't. The two of you make a very excellent Society for Mutual Admiration.'

'Yes—of you.'

The remark was a quite innocent and unpremeditated one; but it seemed to startle Sabina somewhat. She instantly changed the subject.

'I want you to do something for me, Janie. There are one or two notes I must send; will you write them? Mrs. Reid will bring up a small table and a chair, if you ask her, and the writing materials. And the note that goes to papa must be sprinkled with carbolic acid, or he will be frightened out of his wits.'

So Janie set about her duties as amanuensis; and had no time to consider further why it was that Sabina had been so quickly startled by an innocent mention of Walter Lindsay's obvious admiration for her.

But if, during this first fortnight, all seemed going well—if it almost 'looked like playing at having illness'—a time came when that cheerful optimism was asked to pause and consider. Somehow the little boy did not recover his strength as he ought to have done. The fever had run its course, apparently in the most satisfactory way; and the doctor had not discovered symptoms of any of the *sequelæ* that frequently follow this dangerous disease; but all the same the child, instead of going forward to perfect health, seemed to linger. Sabina perceived this less than did the doctor and the nurse; or perhaps she shut her eyes to it; if any terrible doubts hammered for entrance into her mind, she held that closed against them, and barricaded herself along with her dearest hopes.

'You know,' she said one afternoon to Walter Lindsay, 'I am not in the least anxious to have the boy getting about soon. Oh no; not in the least. Of course, the risk of a chill must be so much greater in this cold weather. I have always thought that the hospitals shouldn't keep to their rule of sending scarlatina patients out at the end of five or six weeks, when the weather is bitterly cold, or when the patient has a delicate constitution. Oh no, I should not be disappointed if Harry did not get out until—until the flowers came. Now is not that a poetical notion?' she continued, with real or affected cheerfulness. 'When the primroses and bluebells are thick in the woods, and the air quite soft, then Harry will make his first appearance out-of-doors. Poor little mite, he will have to be carried; you have no idea how his legs are wasted—of course, that is nothing unusual—oh dear no, I have often seen children unable to stand when getting up from a fever. Yes; I suppose he will have to be carried; and I am going to ask a favour from you when that great day comes—that splendid day—I am going to ask you to lend me that enormous coat of yours with the Canadian furs.'

'I will give it you, and gladly,' he said at once.

'Oh no, no, no; it is only for the first day; and we will wrap the dear in it; and the nurse will carry him out to look at the world again, and the primroses, and the woods. Why, wouldn't that make a subject for a picture—you might call it "The sick child's first day out-of-doors"

—the nurse in her hospital dress, and the poor little white face peeping out from the furs.'

'The poor little white face,' she repeated absently—as if her eyes were turned backward, and regarding the sick-room behind her. 'And if you saw how thin and wasted his arms are—you remember the tramway-car you brought him—we used to tie a long string to it, and put it at the farthest end of the room, and let him pull it across to the bedside. But he has no strength for that now—or perhaps it is that he does not care for it any more——'

Tears trembled on her eyelashes; but the moment he tried to comfort her with a few reassuring words she altered her tone.

'Oh, that is nothing unusual,' she said quickly (as if she were eager to convince herself). 'I have often seen children like that. It isn't the plump children who are safest in a fever—quite the reverse. And Harry has always been a particularly healthy child. Of course, it will be a long time before he has quite recovered his strength, but I shall be satisfied when I once see him out-of-doors, with some bluebells in his hand.'

'And if you don't object,' Lindsay said, 'I think I should like to come along and join that little excursion.'

But this same evening he waited for the doctor. The doctor was grave and reticent; he could not be got to say anything beyond the merest commonplaces about the little boy's condition. There was a singular lack of vitality, he

said; there seemed to be no fight in the constitution; the recovery that was natural in the circumstances seemed to drag. Was there danger? No immediate danger, he thought; with sounder sleep, and some little increase in his food—if only he could be persuaded to take that—they would probably find him gradually emerging from this languor and extreme prostration. In the meantime everything that could be done was being done.

Lindsay walked somewhat slowly and thoughtfully home that evening—away through the wan, still, moonlit country. And his mind was busy not with the coming years, but with the coming weeks; and there were dark forebodings that, do what he could, would press in upon him. Once or twice he shivered slightly—as if some unknown terror had glided by, touching him as it went. Or perhaps it was only that the night was bitter cold.

CHAPTER XLI

A SEVERANCE

The child still lingered on in that condition of impassive languor; but Sabina maintained her defiant attitude; she would talk of nothing but the young spring days, and the warm winds, and primroses in the woods, and the welcome big coat heavy with its Canadian furs. Only her lips grew thinner and paler; and her eyes were at times haggard, as if with much midnight thinking.

Once she broke down. Lindsay had been up to London, and had brought back with him a little toy, which he offered to her humbly. It was a light little thing that ran on wheels.

'It is not so heavy as the tram-car,' he said. 'Perhaps, now, if you would tie a bit of string to that, he could pull it across the floor.'

She looked at the toy in silence; there was a slight quivering of her lips.

'Yes, perhaps—perhaps,' she said in a low voice, 'but the thin wee arms are not very strong.'

She suddenly looked up, in a wild, frightened way.

'Mr. Lindsay, my boy is not going to die, is he? They are not going to take away my little boy from me?'

It was a cry of anguish rather than of appeal; her nerves were all unstrung; and the next moment she had burst into a frantic fit of weeping. The curtains fell from her hands; she was invisible to him; he could only hear her sobs. And then there was the sound of a door opening and shutting; she had gone away to her unceasing vigil, with its awful and growing fear.

He sent for Janie, who came down forthwith; and he went to meet her at the station. When she got out of the railway-carriage, she gave him her hand in silence; she was trembling like a leaf; she could not utter a word.

'I have got a room for you at the Checkers,' he said. 'It is the best they have. Of course you won't let her know you are here; it would only madden her with fright.'

'As you think best,' was all she said.

But as they were on their way to the village, she said to him: 'If anything happens to the boy, then it's all over with Sabie. He was just the world to her. If he is taken away, then she will give in—it will kill her.'

'Don't say that,' he answered gravely. 'Trouble comes to every one; it has to be borne.'

'But who has had such trouble as she has had—and who has so little deserved it?' she said, and she was very much excited in her distress. 'I say it is not—it is not justice! Yes, plenty of people have trouble—but they are

not like Sabie. She has just lived for others. And now the little boy—her one consolation in the world—Mr. Lindsay, do you call that justice?'

'Things are not at their worst yet,' he said to her. 'I suppose you can stay here for a day or two?'

'Oh yes. How could I go away until—until I knew that the boy was out of danger?' said Janie bravely. 'Phil is going to run down to-morrow to see that I am comfortably settled; but I am sure there is no need.'

'As to that,' said he, 'if you would rather have the room that Mrs. Reid occupies now, I could send her to the Checkers to sleep. But I am afraid Sabina would get to know you were in the house—and it would alarm her.'

'No, no, the inn will do very well,' Janie said.

'I thought she ought to have a woman-friend near her, just in case anything should happen,' he continued. 'And I am sure I shall be glad to have you here, for a woman's judgment in lots of things is more delicate and discriminating than a man's. What do you think, now, of sending word to Sir Anthony that the little boy is seriously ill—I mean, without letting Sabina know; shouldn't that be done? Of course I would do nothing of the kind if I thought he would come down and alarm her in some stupid way.'

Janie received the mention of Sir Anthony Zembra's name with marked coldness—nay, with open scorn.

'I wrote to him the last time I was down,' she said.

'Sabie asked me to write. The letter had to be soaked in carbolic acid, although it had never been in the sick-room at all. And do you think Sir Anthony would come near a house in which there was scarlet fever? Not likely. He has far too great a sense of his importance to the country. A man of such value to the nation couldn't afford to run any risk. And society—think of the possibility of society losing so handsome and distinguished-looking an ornament.'

'You are revengeful. But I really think we ought to send him word that the boy is seriously ill. And you must write the note.'

By this time they were arrived at the inn, where Janie found that they had prepared a very snug little room for her. There was a fire burning brightly; there were some books and flowers on the table; this would make quite an excellent little sitting-room in the daytime, if she chose. But besides that, they had placed at her disposal a small inner parlour downstairs, in which she could see any one: they seemed anxious to oblige this friend of the young mother whose trouble had awakened general sympathy.

Janie wrote the note to Sir Anthony that afternoon; and, contrary to all expectation, he came down to Witstead the very next day. But it was neither she nor Walter Lindsay—it was Lindsay's housekeeper, Mrs. Reid, who found at the door of the cottage this tall, handsome, fresh-complexioned, white-haired, bland-looking man. Standing

a little bit back, he made the usual inquiries as to how the child was going on; and said he was sorry to have no better news. Then he said, 'You will tell Mrs. Foster that her father called——'

'I beg your pardon, sir,—her father, did you say?' Mrs. Reid said in some surprise.

'Yes.'

'But won't you come in, sir?'

'Oh dear, no—I suppose what you have told me is quite correct.'

'But wouldn't you like to see the poor lady, sir?'

'No, no; no, no. I suppose you are not aware that she has brothers and sisters. She herself would be the last to expect that I should run the risk of carrying infection to members of her own family.'

He delivered these sentences with that calm and impressive manner well known to the House of Commons, when, having caught Mr. Speaker's eye, he rose to his feet, placed his right hand within the breast of his frock-coat, and, with another glance round the House, said, 'Sir!' Naturally, this poor housekeeper was overawed; but she was an elderly woman, with some experience of human life; and she had a bewildered, instinctive notion that a father would like to see his daughter—if only but to say a kindly word to her—in the time of her great trouble.

'Perhaps you don't understand, sir—the two rooms are quite isolated,' she said. 'There are carbolic curtains

separating them from the rest of the house. There would be no risk of carrying infection.'

'Permit me to be the best judge of that,' he observed.

'Oh, certainly, sir,' she said, with apparent humility; but she was beginning to rebel a little; she was a vertebrate animal.

'And I will thank you to take my instructions. I wish my daughter to be informed that I called; and that I was sorry not to hear better news. If she wants for anything, I hope she will write—by a third person, mind—be particular about that, if you please—she must write by a third person, as she did on the last occasion—and I will see that her wishes are attended to. Good-morning!'

'Good-morning, sir,' said Mrs. Reid; and for a minute or two she stood on the doorstep, looking after the stately and handsome gentleman, who passed down through the little garden and finally disappeared away along the road. But she did not at once go upstairs. She had been interrupted in some domestic duties; and she went back to the kitchen to resume these; and for a while she was chiefly engaged in considering what kindly little messages she could safely add to that which had been left with her to deliver. And she thought that when Mr. Lindsay came along in the afternoon, and when she confessed what she had done, he would say that these lies were very white indeed.

So the anxious days passed. Lindsay saw little of

Sabina now. When he rapped at the door she sent the nurse. She would not leave the bedside where that small life seemed to be flickering so feebly. The nurse said to him once: 'I wish you would speak to her, sir. She won't take any rest. Sometimes she falls into a dose in her chair—for a few minutes, that is all. No human being can bear up against that long.'

'Tell her I want to see her,' he said.

In a second or two Sabina was there; he was shocked at the change he saw.

'You are acting very wrongly,' he said. 'This weakness may last for a long time—what is to become of your care, of your nursing, if you will take no rest?'

'I have tried—I cannot sleep,' she said, simply.

'No, you cannot sleep so long as you remain in that room. Why not lie down in the nurse's room, when it is her turn to sit by him?'

'I cannot be away from my boy,' she said.

Then she suddenly raised her head, and fixed a strangely scrutinising glance upon him, as if she would read him through and through.

'Mr. Lindsay, is the doctor telling me the whole truth? He is not concealing anything? What does he say to you?'

Piteous and haggard as were her eyes, he felt that they had a certain command in them.

'You are my friend—I trust you to tell me the whole truth,' she said. 'You cannot refuse.'

Well, he did not try to shirk the responsibility. As nearly as he could he repeated the very phrases—inconclusive as these were—which the doctor had used to himself. She listened in silence, and she seemed to be weighing every word. The pale, sad face betrayed no emotion; but her eyes were distant and thoughtful as she retired, without further questioning, into the room.

He went over the way to the Checkers and sent for Janie to come downstairs.

'I suppose you have all your things ready?' he said—referring to a complete change of costume she had got down from London, lest at any moment she might be asked to take her place in the sick chamber.

'Yes, everything,' was the instant answer.

'Well, there is only one thing to be done, as far as I can see,' he continued. 'Sabina is killing herself. The watching and the anxiety combined are too much for her—you can see it in her face, in her eyes. Poor creature, it is no longer "like playing at having illness in the house." That was making sure too soon.'

'What do you want me to do?' Janie said.

'I want you to go right into the room and insist on remaining there; and then you must force Sabina to lie down from time to time and get some rest. The nurse has no authority over her; you must have.'

'I may frighten her if I go in suddenly,' Janie said in doubt.

'She is frightened of only one thing—she thinks of nothing else—she will hardly heed you,' he said.

So Janie went over to the cottage and installed herself in the sick-room without protest. There was little nursing to be done; only waiting, and waiting for what nearly every one in secret feared.

One evening the doctor came downstairs and found Walter Lindsay reading a book in the little parlour. He was really waiting for news.

'Don't you think you should send for her father?' the doctor said.

Lindsay looked up quickly. 'Then the end is near?'

'I am afraid so,' the doctor said, speaking low so that no one should overhear. 'Never since this lingering began has there been any sign of a fight against it—nothing but a gradual losing of vitality; and now the child is alive, but that is all you can say.'

'But surely patients sometimes recover after they have got down to the lowest phase of exhaustion?—isn't there a chance?—if it is only weakness, there might come a turn?'

He put these questions without much hope of an answer. What he was really thinking of was Sabina in her lonely condition—bereft of all she cared for on earth. Nor was this the first time that picture had come before his mind. For days back dread possibilities had been ever present; and in his solitary evenings, sitting before the fire and absently looking to the future, he sometimes saw a

young widow, in deepest mourning, enter a little churchyard. There was a small white gravestone there with flowers around it, and perhaps, after the simple record of name and date, this inscription—'*Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind zurück.*' The young mother kneeling—that was a pitiful sight—and putting further little flowers on the little grave.

He had almost forgotten the presence of the doctor in the room.

'There is no hope, then?' he said, looking up from his reverie.

'One must never say that,' was the answer. 'But for myself, I think the end is near.'

'Does she know?'

'I imagine so, though nothing definite has been said. I hear she has had some violent fits of crying, when she was by herself in the smaller room. I think she is prepared for the worst. Indeed, she is almost in a dazed condition, what with want of sleep and fatigue and dread of what may happen. I am glad of it. She is so worn out that when the end does come, it will be less of a shock; her nerves seem to be numbed; she goes about in a kind of hopeless and mechanical way—yes, I think she must know.'

'As for sending for her father, that would be no use, as he would not come near a house where there had been scarlet fever. And as for her late husband's father, he can't stir out-of-doors on account of rheumatism, or he would have been here ere now, he writes. But when you think

the crisis is at hand, I will go along to the Vicarage and ask Mr. Lulworth to come and be with her. The family have been very kind to her, and she has a great respect for the old man: don't you think I should do that?'

'Certainly.'

'When?'

'As far as appearances go, I think the boy may last through the night.'

'But not much longer?' said Lindsay, considerably startled.

The doctor shook his head. 'I am afraid not,' he said.

However, it was not until late the following night that the end came. Janie was in the room and the clergyman; the nurse had retired—her services were unavailing now; Walter Lindsay was below, waiting anxiously enough for news. Sabina would not leave the bedside; she knelt there motionless, voiceless, tearless, holding the small, thin hand in hers; her very soul hanging on that faint breathing that was gradually growing more and more feeble. And then the little life, happily without any struggle, passed quite quietly away; and the mother's head fell forward on the bed with a dumb moan of agony. No tears came to her aid; she was too worn out and bewildered and stricken down. Consciousness seemed to have gone from her with that low wail of pain. Janie was at her side, and would have taken her away; but the next moment Sabina was erect, in the middle of the floor, and her eyes were as of one

bereft of reason, taking no heed of those around her, and for a second she looked as if she were listening. Then she went quickly to the window and tore aside the blind. Far overhead the midnight skies were shining; the myriad stars were cold and clear. A little way she raised her trembling fingers as if she would fain reach to those distant plains; and then they heard the stifled and piteous cry—

'And there is no one—no one there—to take care of my little boy!'

'No one,' said the clergyman, 'no one—except Christ the Lord.'

And then he put his hand on her arm, and led her from the room.

CHAPTER XLII

DARKENED DAYS

This should have been a wedding morning. The earth had donned her fairest bridal robes—the soft snow mantle gaining a touch of gold from the wintry sunlight; clear and cloudless shone the pale blue skies; there were diamonds sparkling in the hedgerows; the vane of the church-spire flashed a distant ray. But it was a black-hued little procession that moved slowly through the white, hushed world—out from the straggling village, along the rutted lane, and up to the gate of the churchyard. The neighbours were lingering about the porch; when the tiny coffin had been carried in they followed and entered the pews; no one seemed to notice that, just before the door was shut, two women, both dressed in deep mourning and closely veiled, came in last of all, and took their places rather apart from the rest. They were in the dusk; their heads were bent down; not even Walter Lindsay guessed that the stricken mother was there, come to hear those dreadful words of a last farewell.

When the service was over, and the little crowd passed

out again into the sunlight and the snow, these two remained behind for a second.

'Sabie—dear Sabie—come home now! You can't hear it; it will kill you!'

She did not answer; she only shook her head. But as they went out into the white churchyard she held Janie's arm tight, for she was trembling a little. They took up their station a short distance from the others; the bystanders paid no heed to them; all eyes were turned towards the clergyman and the open grave and the small, small coffin covered with white flowers. It was when they proceeded to lower that tiny coffin into the grave that Janie found her companion was shaking like a leaf, so that she was afraid she would totter and fall; and when the first sprinkling of earth struck with its hollow and ominous sound, the young mother uttered a short and stifled cry, as if a dagger had gone through her heart. Janie had almost to drag her away. 'My little boy!'—that was all she said; and she spoke no more as they made their way back to the village, far in advance of the others, the two black figures in that world of white. Arrived there, Janie took her to her own room in the inn. Sabina was purposeless in a strange kind of way; she sat down at the window, where she could see—across the dreamlike waste of snow—the little church, and its windows, and the spire, and the vane sending forth its steady golden ray. Then her head fell forward on her hands.

A message came for Janie that Sir Anthony Zembra was below, and wanted to see her. She went down to the small parlour. Never in all this world was there a more suave and distinguished-looking and perfectly-appointed mourner; as he took off his black kid gloves and put them on the table, so that he might rub his hands because of the cold, and as he took up his position on the hearth-rug in front of the fire, he seemed to say that not any one of the trials or duties of life could find him wanting; put the occasion before him—he was there, and equal to it.

'I heard that she was with you,' he remarked. He had not seen his daughter that morning—not having cared to go within doors.

'Yes,' Janie answered. 'She will stay here until the house is disinfected. My husband and Mr. Lindsay were going up to London immediately the funeral was over to see about having it done at once.'

'A most necessary measure,' Sir Anthony observed, with approval. 'It is an imperative duty that one owes to the rest of the community. And I hope it will be done thoroughly, whether Sabina goes back to the cottage or not. She herself has always been too reckless in such matters——'

'I don't think so at all!' Janie said rather hotly; who was he that he should criticise Sabina's conduct?

'Ah, you joined with her in those foolish enterprises,' he said, with a superior air.

'My share in them may have been foolish enough—

Sabie's never was,' said Janie, whose meek eyes were growing indignant. 'It's all very well for people who sit in their own homes, surrounded by every selfish luxury—it's all very well for them to talk of foolishness when any one tries to do a little good in the world. Perhaps you never even took the trouble to go and see what it was that Sabie was doing?'

'We will not discuss the question,' he said, in his grand manner. 'If I have offended you, I beg your pardon. I merely wished to express the hope that before my daughter goes back to the cottage the most rigid precautions may be taken to guard against the spread of infection. Temerity in such matters is the worst of folly. It is not bravery; it is criminal heedlessness. And I think that even you cannot deny that Sabina has always shown herself far too careless —only now she may be warned by the terrible consequences.'

'But what do you mean?' Janie said, with her face grown a trifle pale. 'That Sabie was careless about her boy?—that she was responsible— —' Janie's words failed her; her indignation was too great. But she pulled herself together. 'Have you anything further to say to me, Sir Anthony?' she demanded coldly. 'I am going back to Sabie.'

'I wish to hear what she proposes doing,' Sir Anthony said, 'that is all.'

'I don't know,' was Janie's answer.

'For it is quite absurd her going back to live by herself

in that cottage,' he continued. 'I suppose that at present it would be useless for me to see her, to discuss the matter with her.'

'She won't see anybody—she can't,' Janie answered.

'At all events I should like her to know this,' Sir Anthony said, 'that Lady Zembra is perfectly willing that she should return to her own home—always, of course, on condition that she should abandon those pursuits which made that impossible when she used to be in London. Probably she has had enough of that. In the circumstances, then, and with the condition I name, we are quite willing she should return to her own home.'

'As for that,' said Janie (and there was a touch of scorn in her voice that might have pierced Sir Anthony's complacency, had that not been so entirely gigantic), 'as for that, Sabie will never have to go begging for a home. There are plenty who would be proud to have her—proud and pleased. And I know that if she will come and live with us, neither my husband nor myself will stay to impose any condition—no—she shall live in any way she chooses—and I can answer for it that her welcome will be none the less.'

'Ah,' said Sir Anthony, looking at her as if she were some kind of sentimental maniac. 'Well, it is a good thing to have friends. But friendship is apt to get strained if one lives continually in the same house.'

'Was it ever so in Kensington Square?' said Janie boldly.

He did not answer that question.

'Common sense,' he went on to observe, 'would suggest that a single woman in her circumstances should come and live in her own home. At the same time, if she prefers her freedom—I mean, if she wishes to return to the occupations of those former days—well and good; she will have her allowance as before.'

Janie interposed quickly, and with a flushed forehead.

'Of course, if she comes to live with us, it will be as our guest. That is clearly understood by all of us.'

'Oh, then you have put that proposal before her?'

'Yes.'

'And her answer?'

'It was only a suggestion—we wanted her to know that there was a home awaiting her—and she said nothing definite in reply. And at present it is useless to say anything.'

'At all events,' Sir Anthony said, 'you are of opinion that she should not continue to live by herself in that cottage? Why, good gracious, she might be murdered in bed; that would be a nice story to get into the papers!'

This indeed was an appalling thought—that the name of Sir Anthony Zembra might be dragged into the public prints in connection with an obscure and revolting village tragedy!

'Yes, I want to get her away from here,' said Janie, sadly, 'but it is no use talking to her at present. I wish

she was not going back into the cottage at all. I wish she would come away with us this very afternoon, as soon as Phil—my husband, I mean—as soon as he comes down from town. That would be the best thing.'

'Then do you return home this afternoon?'

She glanced at him in surprise; she could hardly understand any human being putting such a question.

'Oh no! How could I do that? How could I leave Sabie at such a time—alone? If she would go with us, that would be well; but as it is I must remain with her to see what she is going to do.'

'And when she has decided that, I hope you will let me know,' Sir Anthony said, and he took up his gloves. 'I presume, when these sanitary measures have been carried out, there will be no possibility of a letter conveying infection. You might tell my daughter that Lady Zembra would have written to her to express her sympathy but that she thought it more prudent not to open communication with a house in which there was fever. We have got to consult the safety of others, not our own feelings.'

When he had delivered himself of this wise saying, Sir Anthony took up his hat and umbrella; again asked Janie to communicate with him when Sabina had come to a decision; bade her good-bye graciously; and set out for the station. He walked with an air of lofty satisfaction; he seemed to think that it was he who was diffusing that cheerful sunlight over the wide landscape.

Those next few days at Witstead were terrible. Sabina had wholly given way to a dumb stupor of misery and hopelessness; she was as one walking in the dark, seeing nothing of what was around her, heeding no one. She hardly ever spoke; she had no wild fits of crying; there was nothing but this dreadful monotony of unuttered and unutterable grief. Mechanically she went up every morning to the little grave, with a poor handful of flowers; sometimes she would go in the afternoon too; and always her dull despairing thoughts were there.

Janie sought in vain to distract her and arouse her. Sometimes she wilfully inflicted pain if but to break in upon this dangerous listlessness. Once she went the length of asking what should be done, when they could go into the house again, with the little boy's toys and playthings. Sabina shivered, but did not answer.

Janie went to Walter Lindsay, who was pretty frequently over at Witstead, hurrying on the workmen.

'I do everything I can to get her to talk,' said Janie, 'and of course she has to settle what she is going to do. But it is very strange. She is keeping something back from me. It is always, "Wait a little while and I will tell you." I don't understand it at all. Even about the house: it appears it belongs to a Mr. Deane; but she does not know where he is; and when I asked her how she paid the rent, it was the same thing—"Wait a little while, Janie, and I will tell you everything. I cannot talk to you now, or to

any one." But she thinks it is you who put the fresh flowers on the little grave every morning. Is it?'

'No.'

'Do you know who it is, then?'

He hesitated.

'Oh well, if you must know, it is one of the Lulworth girls. I asked her to do it for me. I have them sent down from London, and she takes them up. You need not say anything about it.'

Janie thought she would follow her own counsel about that.

'Then, what do you think she is going to do?' he asked.

'As likely as not she will go back to the hospital and become permanent nurse,' Janie answered—but this was merely a guess of her own. 'It is dreadful to think of the poor, broken, wasted life. You remember what Sabie used to be in the old days? Well, last night I was lying awake, and I was wondering whether it would not be possible for some one to take Sabie entirely away from what has happened during these last years—to take her away altogether, to some other country, and teach her to forget. And I thought that you were the only one who cared for her enough, and had money to do it as well; and I saw all sorts of pictures of you two—walking along the Promenade Anglais at Nice—and Sabie laughing and happy again——'

He turned very pale, but she did not notice; she was intent upon her waking dreams of the previous night.

'Yes, and I followed you to Venice—I was an invisible ghost attending you—and I saw Sabie feeding the pigeons in the Square—and I saw you and her in one of the glass factories over at Murano, and you were drawing her initials on a bit of paper so that the man could copy them and put them on the jug he was moulding for her. I wonder if such a thing ever happens in the world—for people to forget the years of misery they have gone through, and become happy again as they used to be? It seems hard if it is impossible.'

However, these were but forecasts of a vague and shadowy future; and in the meantime Janie was soon to be startled by a definite announcement of Sabina's plans. On the second evening after they had returned to Wayside Cottage—the fumigation and so forth all being over—these two were seated in the little parlour together, Janie sewing, Sabina pretending to read, but more often with her calm, sad eyes fixed wistfully on the fire before them. At length she took a letter from her pocket.

'Janie,' she said, 'a few days ago I wrote to old Mr. Foster, down in Buckinghamshire, and this morning I received his answer.'

Janie was a little surprised to have heard nothing of this before; and quite simply and naturally she put out her hand to take the letter—for there never had been secrets between these two. It was hastily withdrawn, however.

'He writes very kindly,' Sabina said, slowly; 'and he

asks me to go and live with him, though he says it's a dull house—I wonder if he thinks it is gaiety that I should prefer.'

'And are you going?' said Janie, rather breathlessly.

'When I have everything settled up here—yes. I think it is the best thing I can do.'

'Oh Sabie, we shall never see you at all!' Janie cried.

'And don't you think that would be best?' was the calm answer: she was staring absently into the flames.

Janie's eyes grew moist quickly enough.

'After the friends that you and I have been, Sabie, it does seem—a little hard—that you should talk in that quiet way about going away from us for ever.'

'But I shall not forget,' the other said. 'And soon after I am there I will write you a long, long letter, to explain a number of things. I ought to tell you the whole story now, but I have not the courage. And I am so tired,' she added wearily.

Janie did not understand what this promise meant; and perhaps paid little attention to it, for she was bent on opposing this decision—it seemed so dreadful that Sabina should withdraw herself into a seclusion so remote from all those who had known her.

'You have so many friends in London, Sabie! It was bad enough your coming down here; but now, when there is no reason in the world why you shouldn't come and live with us—I wish Phil were here, and he would speak for

himself—to think of your going away down to that place to bury yourself alone, and brood over all that has happened? Is it wise? Is it reasonable? Surely you should come amongst your friends—I don't mean at this precise moment, but by and by, when time has begun to tell a little. We don't ask you to come to any gaiety. It is a quiet house. You would have your own rooms; no one should disturb you when you wished to be alone.'

For answer Sabina took Janie's hand and patted it a little.

'You have always been so kind to me—I never could understand why. But I am going down to Buckinghamshire, Janie,' she said.

It was later on that same evening—in the dead silence that was broken only by the click of Janie's needle—that Sabina looked up from her reveries and said, 'Janie, there is one thing I must do before I leave this place. I must say something to Mr. Lindsay of what I feel towards him for all his goodness to me—his generous goodness and thoughtfulness and kindness. I am sure I don't know how I shall say it—but I must try. I cannot go away and leave him to think me ungrateful.'

'That he never would think, nor any other ill of you, Sabie!' Janie said eagerly. 'But surely you are right—surely you can do no less,—and a word from you would be a great deal to him,' she made bold to add.

'I suppose you don't know when he will be here again?' was the next question.

'No, but I could send him a note,' said Janie promptly.

'You might tell him that I was going away, and that I wished to say good-bye—if it would be not too much trouble for him to call when he was in the neighbourhood.'

Janie's nimble brain soon fashioned forth a better scheme than that—though she kept it to herself. Could she not, on the next morning, find some pretence for slipping out, and make her way south to Burford Bridge by one of the early trains? A few words with himself would be of greater service than any note; and was not the occasion urgent? Sabina was going away. She would be beyond the influences she had known; she would forget; she would sink into apathy; she was closing the book of her life. But what if, at such a juncture—and she was helpless and distraught and uncertain—some sudden appeal were made to her? It seemed dreadful to think of weddings and wedding-bells, when one had to think, too, of the little grave lying far away there amid the as yet unmelted snow; but short of that, might not some vague hint be given her that wherever her footsteps might lead her, there would always remain open for her the refuge of a strong man's love, when time and distance had dulled the edge of her cruel sorrows?

CHAPTER XLIII

FAREWELL WORDS

Yet this was a delicate and difficult task that Janie had undertaken. She could not forget that on Walter Lindsay's return from America he had told her plainly enough that any relationship between Sabina and himself should be just as Sabina wished it to be, and that he would be content with that, nor seek for anything more. Also, in this latter time of trouble, his kindness towards Sabina, though it had been great and obvious and assiduous, had been rather the kindness of an affectionate brother or intimate friend, assuming the right to do things for her as a matter of course. There had been none of the sensitiveness of a lover about him. Almost there had been a trifle too much authority. But perhaps the occasion did not permit of any studious refinements of manner; and Sabina, at least, as Janie knew, had taken no offence.

However, during the brief journey to Burford Bridge, the more Janie looked at the main object of her self-imposed mission, the less she liked it. She began to grow very uncomfortable. It was too great a responsibility. At last—and

with a considerable sense of relief—she resolved to throw it over altogether ; she would surely deliver Sabina's message ; and that, she knew, would be welcome. Accordingly, when she reached the hotel, and found that Lindsay had already gone off to his work, she made no scruple about sending for him ; she guessed that he would not resent the interruption.

In the meantime she began to look round these bachelor quarters with not a little curiosity. She half expected to find some portrait or photograph of Sabina—even some slight pencil drawing—but there was nothing of the kind. Apparently he had brought down with him few things beyond what he needed for his daily toil. A volume of *Volkslieder* stood at the open piano ; and there were some loose sheets of music on the top. Hardly any books were about ; and there were no newspapers. Two large portfolios in a corner, no doubt, contained the bulk of his drawings ; and she did not presume to open these ; but on the mantelpiece—above the pipes and match-boxes and cards of invitation—and also at the back of the piano, were a number of more or less rough sketches, which she proceeded to examine with considerable interest, for she wondered what he could find in such a place at such a time of the year. And it may be said that Janie had had long enough training in the art-world to appreciate certain qualities as distinct from the mere choice of a subject. Incomplete as most of these drawings were, she could see how everywhere the painter of them showed himself easy master of his own

method ; she understood their reticence, their simplicity, their refinement scornful of perversity or whim or trick. For the true artist does not seek to astonish ; his work has reserve and repose ; it demands study, patience, companionship ; it is not for those who choose to run as they read. The Cook's tourist who darts through Venice has no time for Titian's 'Assumption'; but probably, as he jumps into the railway-carriage, he has in his pocket a number of the *Petit Journal pour Rire ;* and every one knows what a gay and smart piece of colour is ordinarily to be found on the outer page of that interesting print.

Janie was standing there in the room, and wishing that Phil would for a little while forsake his mysterious and allegorical virgins to paint for her a series of transcripts of the outer world that she could hang up in her own room (that he could do so, at least in a measure, she never doubted ; for what figure-painter's wife ever believed her husband incapable of painting landscape?) when Walter Lindsay made his appearance.

'Pray forgive me for disturbing you,' she said. 'But I have a message from Sabie.' She thought that would make all things smooth.

'Oh, but I am delighted to welcome a visitor—my first since I came here. Won't you sit down? I hope the message is nothing serious.'

'Oh no, not at all. She wanted me to send you a note ; but I thought I might come along and tell you—the

distance is so short. Sabie's message was this—she would like to see you for a few minutes any time you could make it convenient. The fact is she knows how kind you have been to her all through this terrible trouble; and she wants to thank you—she wants to assure you she is not ungrateful—and so will you come and see her?'

'It is quite unnecessary,' he said. 'If I can be of any service to her, I will go at once, and at a moment's notice; but not for a trifle of this kind. She has other things to think of. Tell her the message she has sent through you is enough—and more than enough.'

'But, Mr. Lindsay, you don't understand!' Janie cried. 'Sabie is going away!'

There was a sudden lump in Janie's throat. Almost she was on the point of blurting out some incoherent appeal—'Mr. Lindsay, are you in love with her still?—will you keep Sabie from going away from all of us?' But she collected herself. She had resolved to abstain from any such dangerous interference. She had merely to give him Sabina's message.

'Going away?' he repeated vaguely. 'Yes, I supposed that would come; and it will be better for her. Where is she going?'

'Away down to Buckinghamshire—to live with old Mr. Foster—and we shall never see her again!' Janie said. 'Fancy her alone there, with that old man for her only company. Now, if she would only come to Kensington

Square, where her friends could see her, and take her about a little, and keep her from thinking. Or if she would come to live with us, that would be best of all; for I could look after her from morning till night; and Phil would be delighted—I shouldn't wonder if she sat to him, for she is so awfully good-natured, and that would be better for his work than having those scraggy creatures about. You might come to see us then, Mr. Lindsay,' Janie added, looking up rather wistfully; for she had been thinking of what evenings they might have together, she and Phil, and Sabina and Lindsay, when all this time of sorrow had gone by.

'Oh, she is going down into Buckinghamshire?' he said thoughtfully. 'Well, I think that is very wise. She will be better alone for a while. It is too soon to think of her going amongst friends. When does she go?'

'Almost immediately,' said Janie, who was disappointed that he took Sabina's departure in this matter-of-fact way. 'As soon as she can leave the house in proper charge—I think she is waiting to hear from some one. But she is very reserved about all her arrangements; and of course one does not wish to worry her with questions at such a time. She says she is tired. Indeed, she is quite worn out, mentally and physically; and so listless; she does not seem to care what happens to her.'

'That will all come right,' he said. 'She has a strong physique. Nature will work its own cure.'

'This is the first time she has shown any interest in anything outside that churchyard,' Janie said; 'I mean in her anxiety that you should know she was grateful to you for all you had done for her.'

Janie looked at him with almost appealing eyes. But he merely said,

'Please tell her not to bother about that. I understand perfectly. Her message through you is enough—more than enough.'

'Mr. Lindsay, when Sabina asks you to come and see her, you are not going to refuse?'

'Oh, if you put it that way, certainly not. I will come and see her, if she wishes. I only meant that it was not worth while bothering about such a trifle.'

'She does not consider it a trifle. Of course,' added Janie, with a little hesitation, 'I had hoped if you came along, that you would help me to persuade Sabie not to go away into Buckinghamshire. It seems a pity she should separate herself from her friends, just when she stands in most need of them. And she has suffered a great deal during these past years—I think they would be willing to try to make it up to her a little. It seemed to me that we might try to get her to look more like the Sabie we used to know.'

'Time may do that—but not any of us,' he said.

'Couldn't one help?' said the faithful Janie. 'But, of course, if it is your opinion that she should go away, there

is no more to be said. I thought you would have been the first to ask her to stay.'

'I think her own instinct is right,' he said. 'And it isn't as if she were going away to some distant country, never to return. Some day you will find Sabina in London again, when she will be better able to face the sympathy of friends.'

'And will you be there, then?'

'Oh, most likely. Why not?'

With a little sigh Janie rose to go.

'When shall I come along to see her?' he asked.

'Whatever time is most convenient. This evening?'

'Yes.'

'Very well. Until then, good-bye.'

'Oh, but you must not go like that,' said he. 'If this isn't a Scotch house, this is a Scotchman's lodging. Let me see—I can't offer you tea or wine at this hour of the day—and I haven't any confections——'

He was looking round the room.

'Oh yes, this will do,' he said, and he fetched one of the big portfolios and threw it open on the table. 'Take a sketch with you. Choose one for yourself.'

'Mr. Lindsay, I cannot, really!' Janie protested. 'They are too valuable.'

'You must not leave the place empty-handed.'

Janie hesitated. She could see that these drawings were much more important and finished studies than those lying about the room.

'Well, to tell you the truth,' said she, 'I was wishing before you came in that Phil could make me some landscape sketches for my own little room at home—that would meet one's eyes every morning—and always with a fresh delight—and if I were to tell you which of all those beautiful things it was that chiefly provoked my envy——'

She went to the piano, and selected one of the drawings there. It was a simple little study of evening light; a wan glare in the western heavens; that repeated in a wet road; between, a strip of dusky hill, with a black wood at its base.

'That one!' he said. 'There is not much in that. But it will do to begin the little collection for your boudoir. Tell Master Phil to levy contributions all round; and then we will have a consultation some day about having them framed in a series.'

He got a couple of pieces of board and made up a small parcel for her; and then he accompanied her to the door, where, with renewed thanks to him, she left. But Janie would have been pleased if, instead of this beautiful little gem of a water-colour, she had taken with her some assurance or hope that that evening he was coming along to ask Sabina to let him provide for her, at least, a safe and happy home.

It was later than he had intended when he reached Witstead; for he had walked, and there were some twilight effects that had caused him to linger by the way. He had convinced himself that it was without perturbation that he

was about to bid farewell to Sabina. As she would probably be in a nervous and depressed and emotional state, it was necessary for him to have plenty of firmness on his side. He should make the parting easy for her; and would take care to cut short this formal business of thanksgiving.

When he entered the room Sabina rose to receive him, and came forward a step or two. There were sudden tears in her eyes; she gave him a trembling hand; she could not speak. But happily Janie was there; and presently, when he had taken a seat, he and Janie found themselves talking about all kinds of indifferent things, and amongst others of the little picture, for carrying off which Janie was now making abundant apologies.

'But that is one of the privileges of a painter,' he said. 'If only his friends think the thing worth hanging up, it serves to recall him to their memory now and again when he may be half a world away. It is purchasing remembrance at a cheap rate.'

'I don't know about the cheapness of the rate,' said Janie. 'I know Phil will be horribly angry with me for having robbed you of such a beautiful sketch.'

'But sometimes one doesn't need any such help to the memory,' Sabina said, in rather a low voice.

Janie now said she would go and ask Mrs. Reid to let them have some tea. She did so; but she did not come back. She went into the dining-room, and lit a candle and sat down there—with her heart beating a little.

Just as she left a look of fright passed into Sabina's eyes, but that was for the briefest second; she seemed to nerve herself for this interview. Why? he asked himself. He had no wish for any formal expression of thanks.

'Mr. Lindsay,' she said, with her eyes cast down, 'Janie says she told you why I wanted you to come here this evening——'

'And I told her how unnecessary it was,' he said, interrupting her. 'I see you are embarrassed at this moment. Why should that be so? These things are better understood than expressed. What mortal creature could be so inhuman as not to do what little he could at such a time? It is not worth speaking about.'

'Ah, do not say so!' she exclaimed, and for a moment she looked up and regarded him with her soft and gentle and grief-worn eyes. 'I will never forget it—never—never—through all the years I may live—and my gratitude to you will be always the same, and will remain ever with me, even if I am not allowed to call you friend.'

He was amazed and bewildered.

'Why, what do you mean?' he cried.

'There was something else I meant to have told you,' she said, with a tired look on her face. 'I have been trying all the afternoon to bring myself to it before going away. But I cannot do it. I am not very strong just now—and—and——'

Her hands fell listlessly in her lap.

'I am sure I would not ask you to tell me anything that would cause you pain,' he said. 'If I had known there was any possibility of such a thing, I would not have come here this evening.'

'But you will have to be told,' she said, with a further effort. 'I will write. I will write to Janie. She will explain to you. And I think Janie will forgive me. But you won't. You are a man; you will take a man's view. And this is all I ask of you—when you find how weak, and foolish, and wicked I have been—when you say that I am no longer fit to be called your friend——'

'I never will, so help me God!' he said; but she went on unheeding,

'—All I ask is this, that though we should never meet again in this world, or, if we should meet—well, perhaps you would pass me by as a stranger—but what I ask is, that if ever you should think of me you will believe that I have not ceased, that I never will cease, to remember your goodness to me at the darkest time of my life.'

Her lips quivered for a moment. As for him, he was stricken dumb. Some wild fancy flashed through his brain that he would ask her if she did not know that his very existence was hers, to be done with as she chose; that faith in the beauty and nobility of her womanhood was as necessary to him as sunlight and the skies of heaven; that, no matter what sorrows or secret troubles might be surrounding her, he was ready to take her by the hand, and

lead her home as sister, or friend, or wife. But how was he to speak words of love, with the fresh-made little grave still present to his mind? Was that the comfort he could offer to the bereft mother? She was safe in the sanctity of her grief—though his heart bled for her.

'Yes,' she said, with an absent air, 'I have been looking at it every way; and I am prepared for that; and deserve it. You will say that I deceived you, and that I accepted all your kindness under false pretences. Janie will understand a little—the terror I was in when my darling was taken ill—how thankful I was to any one who would help me—I had no time to think—I cared only for the saving of my little boy's life——'

Here she broke down altogether; and quickly rose and went sobbing from the room. When she returned, a little time thereafter, he said,—

'Of course, I cannot imagine what you mean; and I don't press for any explanation. I am content to wait. I am content to wait because I know that nothing you can say will alter the relations between you and me. Of that I am as certain as that I am here at this moment. How can I have anything to forgive—or to overlook either? It is impossible. And supposing there was such a thing—which, I say again, is impossible—do you think that the judgment of a woman by a man is harsher than the judgment of another woman? I don't think so. I think you would find a man quite as forgiving as a woman. Of course that is all in the air. You

have no forgiveness to seek from me—it is out of the question. But when you speak of friendship, that is different. I hope, as long as you and I are alive, that at least will exist between us. Nothing may arise to show the measure of it——'

'As if you had not proved that already!' she said.

'But there it is, and always will be. I pledge you my word—and my hand.'

He stretched out his hand to her; she took it, and, stooping her head, touched it with her lips.

'God bless you for what you have done for me in my time of agony,' she managed to say.

'And do not forget what I have pledged you—no matter what you may write to Janie,' was his answer.

Mrs. Reid came in with the tea-things, and Janie followed. Their talk was chiefly about Sabina's going away, the journey down to Missenden, and so forth. Janie showed him a gold pencil which Sabina was going to give as a souvenir to Mrs. Reid (who had flatly refused the offer of a present in money, following the instructions of her master); and Lindsay, as he bade good-bye to these two friends, and was setting forth to return to his solitary lodging, could hardly help reflecting that the old Scotch housekeeper was to be the lucky—and probably indifferent—owner of a trinket which he would have valued at a thousand pounds and more, if Sabina had given it to him of her own free accord.

CHAPTER XLIV

A REVELATION

He was so preoccupied with his own thoughts on leaving the house that he almost ran against a man who came up to the little gate just as he was opening it.

'Hallo, what are you doing here?' the stranger said, in surly and semi-drunken tones.

He did not recognise the voice.

'Yes, I like this! I think this is pretty cool! What are you coming about here for?'

Lindsay's first impulse was to seize the fellow by the neck and kick him into the middle of the road; and undoubtedly that was what would have happened but that the man staggered forward a step, bringing his face more into the faint light sent along from a lamp at the corner. Then a flash of horror went through Lindsay's frame, striking him motionless, stupefying him, and leaving him only with the instinctive determination to bar the way against this drunken wretch's entrance into Sabina's home. That was all he could think off; there was no time to readjust other

matters in his own mind; how to get this man away quietly—that was the immediate thing.

'I should think you had a longer story to tell than I have,' Lindsay said, with an affectation of good-humour. 'Come, let us go over to the Checkers and have a drink.'

'The Checkers? Not I. I'm a dead man.' Then he added, with a bit of a guttural laugh, 'But it would be worth a fiver to walk in all the same. Wouldn't old Mother What's-her-name shriek? Wouldn't her ribbons stand on end?'

The case was growing desperate, for the women within might hear this talking at the gate. And if drink would not entice him away, what would? Of a sudden Lindsay remembered what Janie had told him as to the ordinary motive of Foster's visits hither.

'What have you come back for? Money?'

'What's that to you?' he said, with a sudden return to his sulky manner. 'And what are you doing here? That's what I want to know.'

'Because, if it was money, I would lend you a hundred or two—if you knew of a good horse to back.'

Foster hesitated.

'Walk down to the station with me, and we will talk it over,' Lindsay put in dexterously; and then he passed out, quietly shutting the gate, and the two men set out along the dark road.

'Money from you?' Foster said, with a mock assump-

tion of dignity. 'No. I can make money for myself. What do you take me for? What do I want with your money? But I won't bear any malice. You were a kind of sweetheart of my wife's before she married, weren't you? Oh well, that's all right. And she's all right. Cæsar's wife—above suspicion—that's all right. But I'll tell you what I'll do for you—I'll put you on to something—been a moral ever since the weights were out. I wonder at you fellows who have money and get no fun for it. What's yours in? Consols, I suppose. Ground-rents and rubbish of that kind—buried in a grave. Well, you give me the two hundred, three hundred, five hundred, what you like; and you'll just see something on the 17th of March next. Lend me the money, and you'll see what's what. It's Wednesday the 17th of March that's got to make a man of me. I've been under a cloud long enough. I'm going to emerge then—emerge is the word—in splendour. Then she can make it up with Sir Anthony. If she doesn't, I don't care. I shall have made him serve my turn—and he may kick up any shindy he likes—it won't hurt me——'

Lindsay let him babble on in this way almost unheeded; he was busy with his own rapid plans. For if only he could carry Foster up to London with him, there and then, he could get Sabina to set out forthwith for Buckinghamshire, where she would be safe from persecution. That she knew that Foster was alive he did not doubt; clearly that was the story she had to tell to Janie. Of course it was all a

mystery to him as yet; the one definite thing before him was to try to give her the chance of reaching some haven of shelter. Nor did it occur to him that he was assuming a remarkably bold and unusual responsibility in thus interposing to keep separate husband and wife. For one thing, he had had no time to reflect. It came naturally to him to think of Sabina first; she was to be guarded whatever else happened. And for another thing, he hardly considered the creature beside him to be a man at all—certainly not one whose wishes, projects, or affairs could be regarded as of any account whatever, so long, at least, as he could be kept out of the way.

He looked at his watch, the clear starlight just enabling him to make out the time.

'That's bad luck. Just missed it!' he said.

'Missed what?' his companion said vaguely.

'Oh well, you see, as this transaction may be a big thing, and as I know next to nothing of racing matters, I thought you might have run up to town with me, and had a bit of dinner somewhere, to talk it over. But wait a moment—I have not heard the train pass—perhaps it's late—come along, we may catch it yet.'

He did not wait for the other's consent; and Foster's mind was too concentrated on the prospect of getting this money to perceive that he was being hurried off to London in spite of himself.

'Yes, there she comes!' Lindsay cried—having just

caught sight of a red flare coming rapidly through the darkness. 'Hurry up!—we shall just do it.'

He had but a second in which to get his ticket; then he noticed that as Foster quickly crossed the platform he held his handkerchief to his face; the next moment these two were in a railway-carriage, by themselves, on their way to London.

Perhaps this hurried rush had sobered Foster a little.

'I say, what's all this about?' he said rather angrily, and as if he were awaking out of a stupor. 'What's the use of going to London? I didn't come down here to go right back to London—like a fool. I wanted explanations—oh yes, I can tell you I mean to have matters cleared up now. It was all very well when I was over at Nice—capital excuse getting no letters—but that won't do now. Look here, what is the good of rushing away like this?'

And then he seemed to try to pull himself together.

'Oh yes. The money. That's business. It's business if you mean business——'

'Of course, I want to talk it over,' Lindsay said. 'That's but natural.'

'Don't you expect me to blab,' Foster said, with a gleam of cunning in the bedazzled eyes. 'I know when I've had an extra drink. It was after the long journey—and the beastly cold—and some of the boys were about last night. But I don't blab. No horse's name will pass my lips, not though I was blind. A fine thing you would make of it,

rushing into the open market, and bawling the animal's name all over the place. If you want the thing done on the quiet, then you must trust to me. There's more in it than you think—it's a great game that's being played—you stand in with us—you won't regret it—casting your bread upon the waters, that's what it is——'

The last sentences had been mumbled; then he turned his head to the corner; and almost directly was fast asleep.

And now Lindsay had time to think of Sabina, and of himself, and of certain wistful hopes that had been thus rudely dispelled. Many things were now clear enough to him, especially the coldness with which she had received him on his first visit to Witstead. It was the sudden peril of her child that had startled her out of that repellent attitude; she was glad to have his help in her time of sore need; nor had she shown herself ungrateful. But what could Sabina mean by saying that, when he knew everything, he would probably consider her as no longer fit to be his friend—that he would pass her by as a stranger? That was so very likely! Even supposing that she had lent herself a party to this deception—well, doubtless she had sufficient reasons. How had he suffered by it? He had nothing to forgive. If he had known that Foster was alive, he would have been every whit as glad and eager to be of every possible service to her for her own sake. It was not as her lover that he had brought flowers for the little grave. It was not as her lover that he was now carry-

ing off this semi-drunken creature to London, to give her time to escape into Buckinghamshire.

As for himself—well, that did not much matter. He had grown accustomed to think that life was rather a disappointing kind of thing, a useless kind of thing. But the meetings of the Monks of St. Giles in the New York hotel were amusing. And some one there had told him that the coast of New Granada offered some striking material for the landscape-painter. Perhaps he could get one or two companions to make a small party of exploration? Anyhow, a trip across the Atlantic would be a break; and the evenings in the smoking-room were snug, with the humours of the merry bagmen in their playing of poker or getting up of raffles.

Then he came back to his unconscious companion, and fell to wondering how a wretched rag of existence like this could hold any power of terrorism over such a woman as Sabina. That he had frightened her into concealing the fact of his being alive was pretty evident; though towards what end Lindsay could not imagine. Sabina, who used to be so resolute and independent and full of a happy audacity, to be overmastered and subjugated by a weakling like this! Why, now, how easy it would be to take him up and throw him out of the window! Who would be any the worse? The world would be the gainer. Of course they would call it murder; and murder is not a thing that a well-regulated person ought to contemplate; only whimsi-

cal fancies sometimes come unbidden into the head. On the other hand, if it had not been for the stories Janie had told him, he could almost have felt some compunction for this poor wretch, who looked so horribly ill. Nor was there anything in his appearance to suggest that he was merely suffering from the consequences of a drinking-bout. Indeed, the curiously bedazzled look of the eyes—which Lindsay had noticed before his companion went to sleep—and the pale and hollow cheeks now visible in the dull light of the lamp seemed to speak rather of the use of some poisonous drug than of drink. In any case, Lindsay, who had been forming his own plans as he sat and looked at this poor creature, did not anticipate any formidable antagonism—beyond, possibly, the ebullitions of fractious temper; and he was quite prepared to humour these.

When they got to Waterloo Station Foster woke up—looking dazed and stupid and helpless. Lindsay called a hansom.

'Wait a minute—I must have a B. and S.,' the former said.

'Nonsense, man—just before dinner—you'll blow your head off!'

'I know what'll put me straight,' he said, as Lindsay followed him into the refreshment-room, to keep an eye on him.

'Oh, you needn't imagine I drink. I don't. I couldn't afford it. I've got my living to earn, somehow. But my

nerve isn't what it used to be. How could you expect it? A run of bad luck like mine would ruin anybody's nerve; because, of course, you get anxious to make the most of a chance when it comes in your way. Why, at the pigeon-shooting match at Monaco the other day, I should have been in third for the championship if I had only steadied myself with a good stiff brandy-and-soda before the last shot. A horrible miss—because I was in a ghastly funk, I suppose. Well, here's better luck!'

Now the effect of this drink was speedily apparent in an unexpected way. He ceased those wandering confidences to one who was almost a stranger to him; he became quite watchful and wide awake; by the time they had reached the Gaiety Restaurant and secured a private room there, and when he had made a plentiful use of cold water in the lavatory, he appeared to have shaken off his stupefaction altogether. In the meantime Lindsay had withdrawn for a few moments to send off a couple of telegrams—one to his housekeeper's substitute at Notting Hill; the other to Janie, begging her to see that Sabina set out at once for Buckinghamshire, and to retain Mrs. Reid at Witstead.

'So you have been on the Riviera?' he said to Foster, when he returned to the room.

And now he perceived that Foster was regarding him in a scrutinising way, as if for the first time he was realising how he came to be in a restaurant in London, with a former rival as his host.

'Oh yes,' he said, with affected carelessness. 'There was plenty going on there. Steeple-chasing at Nice—pigeon-shooting——'

'And the tables at Monte Carlo?'

'No,' Foster said coldly. 'I am not such an ass. Of course, if I had plenty of money, I should enjoy an occasional plunge; but the percentage against you is a kind of mechanical thing that there's no use fighting. The truth is, I went to Nice as a kind of business trip. There's some one there who is a partner of mine—at least she's in the same swim; and I had to go and see her.'

And then he looked still more scrutinisingly at Lindsay.

'I say, my good friend, how did you come to be at Witstead this evening?'

'My good friend, as you put it, that is a very odd question,' Lindsay observed; and he met the other's look with one that plainly said, 'Utter a word of suspicion, and I'll fell you.' It was an odd position for two men who were just about to sit down to dine with each other. 'Still, if you wish to know, I happened to pay an afternoon call. My headquarters at present are at Burford Bridge—I am painting there. I have been a good deal over at Witstead during this time of trouble—where one might have expected to find you, I think. However, you may have had your reasons for remaining away; but when I called on Janie and Mrs. Foster this afternoon, imagining that Mrs. Foster was a widow and not a wife—though I should have called

in any case, and, I hope, parted good friends with her—well, if there was any mistake, you know where the blame lies.'

He spoke very clearly; here, evidently, was a man who did not mean to be bullied. Foster mumbled out something about the folly of taking a simple question seriously; and at this moment the waiter appeared, bringing in the soup.

'Now to business,' said Foster, who apparently had become quite sober, though there was still a curious half-bewildered look in his eyes. 'I tell you, I have a good thing—how much do you propose to put into it?'

'That would depend on the inducement, and on the reasonable safety of it,' was the very unsportsmanlike answer.

'I don't know what you mean by reasonable safety,' Foster said peevishly. 'We're not talking about Bank of England shares; we're talking about racing. If the thing was an absolute certainty, where would you get the odds? Do you mean business or not?—or have I come away up here on a wild-goose chase?'

'I hope not; but I want to know a little more clearly how the land lies,' said Lindsay, who really was considering what excuse could be made for detaining him in town.

'I won't tell you the name of the horse.'

'It would be no use to me if you did.'

'I will tell you the race if you like—the Lincolnshire Handicap, 17th March, there you are; and there you will be, landing a pile if you stand in with us. But we want

the money now, when we can get good prices; and I will fairly tell you that the game is to be played on the principle of no questions asked. That's honest now. That's your risk. And I won't promise you that, if the horse wins, you will be paid the odds you would find quoted in the market at this present moment. What would content you now?'

'I really don't know,' Lindsay said, 'for I am quite in the dark in such matters. But that would make it all the more simple—I mean, if I went in at all, I should go in to it as a pure gamble, and leave the whole thing to you. If I attempted to hedge, or anything of that kind, I should doubtless make a complete mess of it. No; I am inclined to go in blindfold; or rather, I am inclined to let you go in for me.'

'To what tune?'

'I should want a little time about that. Where could I see you to-morrow?'

'I will call on you any hour you like. It will be two hundred, anyway.

Lindsay hesitated. He knew quite well that it was as likely as not he would never see a farthing of his money again—he had seen too often in his life the result of these 'good things' and 'morals.' But it was necessary that the inducement hung before Foster's eyes to keep him in town for perhaps several days should be sufficiently large. Two hundred pounds?—it seemed a pity to throw it away.

Then he thought of Sabina, safe in the shelter of the old man's house down in Buckinghamshire.

'Yes, I think I can guarantee two hundred,' he said. 'Give me your address and I will telegraph to you to-morrow when to come and see me, if you can make it convenient. I suppose you will be in town all day.'

Foster pencilled his address on an envelope, and Lindsay put it in his pocket. For that next day, at all events, there was security.

Thereafter, during the course of the little banquet, Fred Foster endeavoured to make himself very amiable, perhaps out of gratitude for this promise of money. He ate next to nothing, and drank very little; but the little he did drink had an effect on him that Lindsay could not in the least understand. He relapsed into his maundering garrulity; and then grew comatose; and finally got up and said that as he had suffered terribly from sleeplessness of late, and now felt that he could drop off at once, he would go straight home and go to bed. Lindsay was not loth to see him depart; probably no two more ill-assorted comrades ever sat down at one table together. And then he also went home.

CHAPTER XLV

CONSPIRATORS

Lindsay did not sleep well that night; and next morning he was up betimes, and off by an early train to Witstead. During those restless hours he had begun to doubt. Perhaps his interference at such a crisis was just a little high-handed, and might provoke resentment? Perhaps Sabina ought to know why he had urged her immediate leaving for Buckinghamshire? Indeed, there were a hundred plausible reasons why he should go down and consult Janie, and see that Sabina was got safely away. But he rather strove to conceal from himself the real reason, which was this: he wished Sabina to understand that, despite the knowledge he had just acquired, he was just as much her faithful friend as ever. To pass her by without recognition? That was not likely.

There was another thing which he tried to hide from himself, or to forget—and that was the tragic hopelessness of the whole situation. What was her future life to be? And his own? Perhaps there was nothing dramatically pathetic in his position—no definite sorrow to be met and

conquered—no sudden blow of evil fortune to be faced. A gray waste of years makes no particular appeal to the human heart. And indeed, for his own part, he deliberately avoided looking at any such prospect. The immediate details he made matters of importance; and strove to confine his attention to them. As soon as he knew when Sabina could start, he would telegraph to the Red Lion Hotel, High Wycombe, asking the landlord to have a conveyance ready to take her to Missenden. And then, as regarded himself? Well, he went no further than the meetings of the Monks of St. Giles in New York. These were quite merry and pleasant. But his face looked rather pallid and worn as he sat in the railway-carriage, and absently looked at the passing landscape.

When he reached the cottage he asked for Janie; and presently Janie appeared—looking scared and breathless.

'Oh, Mr. Lindsay, I have something dreadful to say to you,' she broke in at once, before he could make any excuse for his visit. 'Sabie has told me everything at last. After you left last night she was in a dreadful way—she was crying—and saying she had never received such kindness from any human being as from you—and that you would despise her—and—and—be ashamed to think you had ever made her your friend. And then she told me—what she had intended to tell you, but she hadn't the courage——'

'Yes,' said he, coming to her aid, for he could see how

agitated she was, 'but don't vex yourself about it. I know the whole story. I had the honour of Mr. Fred Foster's company at dinner last night.'

She stared at him—he seemed to take the matter so quietly.

'I met him at the gate as I was going away——'

'We heard some people talking,' she said, breathlessly.

'And as I thought he was drunk I coaxed him into going back to London. I admit it was rather a cool thing to do, but I don't see how any harm can come of it. He got a good dinner; and went off home a little more sober than when I found him—not that I say he was really drunk—I fancy he was as much stupefied as anything else.'

'But,' said Janie, in a bewildered way, 'but you are not angry with Sabie?'

'Angry? On what account?'

'For allowing us all to think he was dead.'

'I suppose she had sufficient reasons.'

'Ah, didn't I tell her you would say that!' Janie exclaimed triumphantly. 'Didn't I say you would pass a charitable judgment on anything she did.'

'But I do not wish to judge her at all,' he said calmly.

'And you don't want to be told why it was that Sabie allowed such a thing?'

'I certainly don't ask to be told,' he answered. 'I assume that you know her reasons. Yet you don't seem

to have fallen out with her. And why should I presume to be her judge in any case?'

'Perhaps you don't know how she values your good opinion,' Janie said. And then she hesitated. 'Yes, I suppose you would be content to say, "Well, whatever it was that happened, Sabie did what was right," and you would ask nothing further about it. But if I were to let you go away like that, I know what she would say—she would say, "Ah, you dared not tell him—you were afraid to see what he would think of me—you hesitated because you knew you would be cutting adrift from me the best of all my friends." You understand, Mr. Lindsay, that she is far more sensitive now than she used to be—her troubles and her living alone have altered her a good deal—and if you only knew how anxious she is you should not think hardly of her——'

It was clear that Janie herself was considerably anxious, if her face told a true tale.

'She says a woman would understand her position a little better—and perhaps forgive her; but not you.'

'I never heard yet,' said he, 'that a man was likely to be more uncharitable towards a woman than another woman would be. I should have thought it would be the other way about.'

'Supposing,' Janie said, rather tremblingly, and she fixed her eyes on him, 'supposing that Sabie was accused of—of —obtaining money on false pretences?'

'I should not believe it,' he said simply.

'But—but if it was true? I suppose nothing would excuse it? You would never forgive her—a man would never forgive her?'

She was regarding him with piteous eyes.

'Now that you have told me so much, you must tell me the whole,' he said. 'Who makes such an accusation?'

'It was her own phrase—the very words she used when she was putting everything as harshly as it could be put, and then challenging me to say that you would not think ill of her. And if I tell you the story now—if I tell it badly—so that you have no sympathy with her, I am frightened——'

'You need not be frightened,' he said. 'None of us who have known her are likely to think hardly of her, whatever she has done.'

'And indeed it was all Foster's doing!' Janie pleaded earnestly. 'He terrified her into it. He was at his wits' end for money. He declared that there was but the one chance to save him from utter ruin. Then he got her to go to Sir Anthony—but that was no use—and she knew it would be no use. Foster was desperate; Sabina herself does not understand what scheme he had on foot, but he was determined to get some money somehow; and so he made sure that if notice of his death were sent to Sir Anthony, there would be some provision made for the

supposed widow. And do you know how he forced her into it? He swore on oath that if she didn't help him in that way he would take the boy away with him to Australia, as soon as the law allowed him to do that, and that she would never see either of them again. It wasn't the first time he had made the threat—he had made it before—and, oh, Mr. Lindsay, if you had seen Sabie the day she came to us to tell us—it was terrible, terrible! I never saw any one so wild with alarm and despair. Just the one thing she lived for to be taken out of her life! Of course Phil told her that Foster could not do such a thing just then; but she said it was all the more horrible to be looking forward to it when the boy would be her only companion. She says herself she thinks she must have been half mad; she clung to the little boy so; and she was in such terror. Foster did it all. He had an advertisement of his death put in a Yorkshire paper; and all she did was to send that to Sir Anthony and to us, and ask us not to come down for a time. When Sir Anthony and I did come down, she was like a stone. And of course neither of us pretended to offer her sympathy; I suppose both of us were secretly glad that the wretch was gone. Sir Anthony gave her a cheque there and then; and he doubled her allowance—making it what it was before her marriage; of course every farthing of that—every farthing she could scrape together—being claimed by that scoundrel. Now that is the whole extent of it—and it was all done under the terrorism

about the taking away of the little boy. Mr. Lindsay,' said Janie, at the end of this appeal, and her eyes were filled with tears, 'you're not going to give up Sabie?—you're not going to ask me to tell her that you are no longer her friend?'

'I am sure you will tell her nothing of the kind—so long as my friendship is of any use to her,' he said. 'It is a pitiable story. I suppose in her present state she exaggerates her share in it. And so she thinks a man would take a less charitable view of it than a woman? Well, I don't know about that. I think a man can see what her situation was just as well as a woman;—a very miserable and unhappy situation that one naturally wishes she had never found herself in——'

'But it's your forgiveness she seeks for,' said Janie, timidly.

'My forgiveness!' he repeated. 'I refuse to utter a single word of blame.'

Then Janie laughed through her tears.

'Ah, didn't I say that!—when she wouldn't believe me. And she is making all the reparation she can,' Janie added eagerly. 'You see the death of the poor little boy left her free. Foster has no longer any hold over her. She won't take another penny of any kind from her father; as soon as she gets down into Buckinghamshire she is going to write to him and confess everything and give up the whole of her allowance. Old Mr. Foster is only too glad to have her go

and live with him; and Sabie never had expensive habits. Then as for her husband I suppose the old gentleman can easily prevent his coming about the place—Fred Foster will now be entirely dependent on him.'

She glanced at him anxiously.

'I don't know how it is,' she said, 'but always you seem to bring strength and calmness with you—and a sense of safety. This morning when I woke I thought everything was at its worst; there did not seem a glimpse of hope anywhere; and even when I thought of you, it was with a kind of fear—for I was not quite sure—I was not quite so sure as I pretended to be to Sabie. But now, now you will let me tell her you don't think so badly of her——'

'That is not the message,' said he. 'If you think she cares for my opinion at all, you may tell her that I quite understand how she was driven to give an unwilling consent, and that I have no blame for her—none.'

'It will be one little bit of happiness for her,' said Janie. 'And I suppose she will be safe from his persecution down there. It's little he knows why she was so tame and obedient before. That is all over now. And that of itself is something. But,' she added wistfully, 'I had been looking forward to a very different future for our Sabie.'

'You got my telegram last night, I suppose?' he said.

'Yes; and I shall be as glad to get away as she will. Fancy if Foster were to come down and find me here!'

'Well, is he a person to be afraid of? But I will see to

that. He will not come down here until you are both of you away. When can you go?'

'The few things will be packed to-day; and I think we can leave to-morrow morning.'

'Very well; you needn't be afraid of Foster coming down,' said he. 'Then I suppose you know what to do. Sabina will tell you whether it is to High Wycombe or to Prince's Risborough you should telegraph to have a trap waiting. And of course you will telegraph to Missenden as well. I suppose it is too much to ask that you should go with her all the way?'

'But I have Phil's strict orders!' Janie exclaimed. 'I am not to leave her until she is comfortably settled in her new home.'

'Oh, that is all right,' he said. 'I shall be glad to have a line from you when everything has been arranged.'

He rose to go.

'And you?' said Janie.

He understood well enough the meaning of this half-frightened question; but he only answered carelessly: 'Oh well, I have still some things to get finished up at Burford Bridge. And I have been thinking of running down to Scotland for a few days, to put my small affairs in order. After that—I don't know.'

'I will write as soon as Sabie is settled in Buckinghamshire,' Janie said. 'I suppose you would not care to see her now? No; it would be better not. She is very much

upset; and I should like to prepare her—oh, she will be so glad to know that you still think well and kindly of her! There is not any one whose opinion she values so much.'

'Make her mind perfectly clear about that, then,' he said, in parting; and then he left the house and returned to London.

This was an objectless kind of day, somehow. He did not know what to do with himself. He could find no employment in his studio. He walked along to the Arts Club; and dawdled away some time there, reading magazines, smoking, chatting to casual droppers-in. Then he went out into the melancholy dusk of the London afternoon; and wandered about the streets and squares; watching here and there the golden gleam of a newly-lit gas-lamp suddenly shoot through the gray. Finally, he got back to the Club again, ordered a bit of dinner, and sat down at a small table by himself—which was not his usual way, for he had heaps of friends and acquaintances.

One of these came into the room.

'Hello, Lindsay, all alone? What's the matter?—you're looking rather glum. And yet you shouldn't be. Of course you've heard what they're prophesying about you?'

'I have heard nothing—I have been down in the country.'

'You don't mean to say you haven't heard that there is a knighthood being got ready for you? Don't you know that —— talks of resigning; then, as a matter of certainty,

the Society will elect you their new President ; and every one says the Queen will rise to the occasion. My congratulations, Sir Walter !'

The recipient of this news did not seem to take much interest in it, however ; perhaps the contingency was too remote ; perhaps the Lindsays of Carnryan could afford to be indifferent about any such decoration.

'I will join you—to the extent of a sherry-and-bitters,' said this amiable newcomer, drawing in a chair. 'But what is the matter really ? You look very depressed.'

'I have reason to be depressed,' Lindsay said, 'and I will tell you what it is. Either to-night or to-morrow morning I have to meet a man ; and my difficulty will be to keep from murdering him. If I murder him it will be bad for me ; if I don't it will be a distinct disservice to the country in which the hound is allowed to live. That's all.'

'What has he done to you ?'

'Nothing to me.'

'Oh, nonsense, people don't take such violent dislikes for nothing—unless you're chaffing. Or is there a woman in the affair ?'

'There is, in a way,' Lindsay answered frankly. 'It is his conduct to his wife that beats anything in the way of meanness—meanness and brutality—that was ever heard of. If I were to tell you here, now, you would want to kick him across the Square and back again, and along down Oxford Street until your boots gave out. And the infernal

ruffian dined with me last night! I didn't know the fifteenth part of what he had done. And he dined with me —sat at the same table!'

Lindsay had begun his story in the ordinary tone of club persiflage, but there was a darker light gathering in his eyes. His companion hesitated for an instant, and then made bold to say: 'My good friend, pray excuse me. I don't want to intermeddle, but I would strongly advise you to come out of that. It is a very dangerous position. When a man has strong sympathy with a married woman who has been injured, and would like to kick and cowhide the husband—mind, I am not speaking of this particular case—but I have noticed that mischief generally comes of it. You of all people, too! You know the kind of talk that goes on about everybody. Well, I never heard your name coupled with the name of a woman even in the most innocent way. Oh yes, there was once, of course. You were pretty badly hit that time; but I suppose you have forgotten all about it now. Let me see, what was her name? The beautiful tall girl with the splendid hair who came once or twice to Mrs. Mellord's. She lived down in Kensington Square with some old people——'

'I know whom you mean,' said Lindsay, shortly.

'But you have forgotten her name! Lord, Lord, what faithfulness there is in man!'

'Her name was then Miss Zembra. I will ask you not to say anything further about her.'

'Her name then? Oh yes, I think I remember something about her getting married.' And then he seemed to be struck with some sudden fancy, and he looked quickly at Lindsay. 'I say, Lindsay, you don't mean that——'

He stopped; and his silence was more significant than words. He dared not even ask whether the Miss Zembra of that time was the married woman whose injuries were now appealing to Lindsay's sympathy, and to his indignation and anger. But the sherry-and-bitters was finished. He rose.

'Of course anything I said was only in chaff,' he remarked. 'But men do get into scrapes in the most innocent way. And anybody going down to Windsor to be knighted would have to have a pretty clean record, as the saying is.'

'Murder might be objected to?' Lindsay said, looking up.

'If I were you I wouldn't see that man, either to-night or to-morrow morning,' his acquaintance said. 'Just you take care. There can be no harm in giving you so much advice. Ta-ta! I'm going to dine at the —— Restaurant; and Lord have mercy on my soul!'

But Lindsay was not much alarmed. Having finished with dinner, he went upstairs to the smoking-room, and there, after some deliberation, wrote a note to Fred Foster, asking him to call at his (Lindsay's) studio the next day at noon; the money would then be waiting for him. He despatched this note by a commissionaire a little after eight

o'clock; and he guessed that it was not likely Foster would think of going down to Witstead at so late an hour; while, as for the following morning, he would have to be in London at least until twelve.

CHAPTER XLVI

A KEEPSAKE

PUNCTUALLY at noon Fred Foster arrived, and was shown through the house and through the garden to the studio. Lindsay was standing with his back to the fire, smoking his pipe. When he heard the footsteps outside he said to himself, 'Now, can I keep my hands off the scoundrel? Can I leave England without telling him what a coward and sneak he is? Is it to be kicking? Or breaking a stick across his back?' But the instant the door was opened all that vanished from his mind. Contempt, pure and simple, took its place. He regarded this miserable creature with loathing, not with anger; briefly bade him good-morning; and then turned to stir the fire so as to avoid the necessity of shaking hands.

'Snug quarters on a cold morning like this,' said Mr. Foster, in a friendly and familiar way. 'You are lucky fellows who can live in a dreamland of your own, instead of being buffeted about the world——'

'I have the money ready for you,' Lindsay said curtly, and he walked across the room to his writing-desk.

'Of course you understand I don't take it as a loan,' Foster remarked, with some little assumption of dignity. 'I take it on commission. If it was a loan I would give you my I O U for it——'

'I will not trouble you,' said Lindsay, with marked coldness.

Foster glanced at him with a twinkle of anger in his half-dazed eyes. 'Supercilious beast!' was doubtless in his mind; but there was a vision of a pale blue cheque before him, and that kept him respectful. All he said was, 'Of course you won't, for I don't mean to. I take the money on commission, as I say; and I explained to you the other night that, if the horse wins, you mustn't expect to be paid the odds that are now quoted in the market. You will get a percentage on the money—that is all; but I daresay it will be handsome enough to satisfy you, if we pull the thing off.'

Lindsay handed him the cheque without a word; it was a heavy price to pay—but by this time Sabina would be on her way down into Buckinghamshire.

'With anything like luck,' Foster said, as he folded up the cheque and put it in his pocket, 'I ought to be able to return you a little slip of paper with considerably bigger figures on it. And I think we are pretty safe this journey. It's about time something was coming my way—I've had such a cursed run of luck as never was heard of in the world before. And if we do pull it off this time, it will be

to a pretty tune, I promise you; it's going to be a big thing, one way or the other; just you wait to see what the 17th of March will bring forth.'

'In the meantime,' said Lindsay, 'when are you going down to Witstead?'

Foster stared, as much as to say, 'What's that to you?'

'Because,' Lindsay continued, 'I should like you to make arrangements to let my housekeeper come back home again as soon as possible.'

'Your housekeeper? What is she doing there?'

'If you had been in your own house while your child was ill, you would know,' was the answer. 'The little girl was afraid of the fever—or her people were—and she left. It was necessary to have some one at once; and I sent my housekeeper down. It is time she was home again.'

'Well, why doesn't my wife let her go?' said he.

'As I understand it, Mrs. Foster was going down to your father's; and my housekeeper was to remain in charge of the place until you showed up—that was the arrangement, I believe.'

'My wife going down to Buckinghamshire?' he exclaimed. 'Who told you that?'

'Mrs. Drexel.'

'Oh, but she shan't! I'll stop that. We'll soon put an end to that manœuvre!'

Lindsay looked at him curiously; and with patience. Indeed, there was no cause for any disquietude now. Sabina

would be on her way to Wycombe by this time; in an hour or two she would be safe in her new home. And so this poor weakling of a creature—with the shaky fingers, and dazed eyes, and half-bemused brain—imagined that he had still a hold over Sabina, when he could no longer terrify her with threats of taking away her child? It was amusing, in a way. Did he think it was his force of character? Or the majesty of the law behind him? Well, undoubtedly the majesty of the law was behind him; but his own pecuniary interests were of more immediate importance to him; and Lindsay did not anticipate that the old gentleman in Missenden would find much difficulty in inducing his worthy son to leave Sabina in peace.

'Well, I'm off,' said the gentleman with the cheque in his pocket. 'Much obliged for your confidence. Hope you won't find it misplaced.'

This time it was the opening of the studio-door that relieved Lindsay of the necessity of shaking hands.

'Good-morning—I suppose you will be able to find your way out?'

'Oh yes—don't you trouble. Good-morning!'

It was the last time these two ever saw each other.

And then Lindsay began his preparations for going away somewhere; for he had grown tired of England, and wished for a change. He was fond of travel and fresh scenes; and he could find occupation for himself wherever he went. So first of all he returned to Burford Bridge, and finished up

his work there; then he made a journey northward to his native Kingdom of Galloway, and saw that his small belongings in that famous county were being properly looked after; and finally he engaged a berth in a White Star liner. New York was to be his first objective point.

And yet he did not like the idea of leaving England without saying good-bye to Sabina—any more than he liked the idea of presenting himself before her a solitary and unsummoned visitor. He went to Janie about it.

'I know quite well,' he said, 'that I was of some little service to her down there in Surrey. But she may think I am pressing too much of a claim on the strength of that.'

'Then it's little you understand Sabie,' Janie answered promptly. 'And what is more—if you have any regard for her at all, you won't leave the country without going to see her. She will never believe that she is fully reinstated in your good opinion unless you do that. Of course I told her all you said—and very glad and very grateful she was—but assurances of that kind coming from a third person are never quite satisfactory. Mr. Lindsay, you will go and see Sabie!'

'She might think it strange, my going there alone,' he said doubtfully.

'Will you go if she asks you?'

'Most certainly!'

'Then wait till the day after to-morrow.'

On the morning indicated by Janie there came to him a

very friendly—if rather timid—little note from Sabina, saying she had heard from Janie that he was leaving England for some time, and intimating that if it was not altogether too inconvenient for him, she would like to have an opportunity of bidding him good-bye. He sought out a time-table; there was a train at eleven o'clock. And so, in due course, he found himself on his way to Prince's Risborough; for he thought he would like to have a walk across the Chiltern hills, to have a last look at an English landscape; besides, that would time his arrival at Great Missenden for about five o'clock, when he could not incommode the unknown household in any way.

The journey down was uninteresting, for a cold gray mist robbed the landscape of any colour it might otherwise have had. But perhaps his eyes were busy with other things than those visible through the carriage-window. It seemed to him as if he was bent on a double leavetaking—this was a last look at England, and a last good-bye to Sabina too.

Arrived at Prince's Risborough Station, he asked for some scrap of lunch at the refreshment-room there, but they could give him nothing. They suggested that if he went on to the village, he might fare better at the George.

'If it's only bread and cheese,' he said to himself, as he set out again, 'I must have something.' For he was not going to have Sabina inconvenienced by the appearance of a hungry visitor.

Great, however, and unexpected was his good fortune at the George—a small inn in the main thoroughfare of this dead-alive and melancholy village. He suddenly found himself in the land of Canaan; for there was a market ordinary going on in the principal room; and they got a place for him with great politeness, and made him very welcome at the bountiful feast. Indeed this was not the first time by many that he had noticed the good fellowship and friendliness and courtesy shown by a number of strangers thrown together in an English inn: a courtesy of which he had never seen the like in any other country he had visited; and he had been a considerable traveller. So far from each man attending solely to his own wants, and gulping his food as if he was running to catch a train, there was a general helpfulness that was almost obtrusive; and there was an air of leisurely comfort about the proceedings, as if each man knew that his dogcart was outside, awaiting his good pleasure. And he liked the wholesome and healthy and sturdy look of these elderly farmers—with their silver-gray whiskers and ruddy complexion, their clear blue eyes, and their deliberate, strongly-accentuated, masculine speech. Their humour was not very subtle, perhaps; their political views were robust and definite rather than learned; and plain common sense and attention to the substantial facts of life were doubtless more in their way than a gay facetiousness; nevertheless, judging by a tolerably wide experience, this type of character was very grateful

to Walter Lindsay, who had long ago arrived at the conviction that the clever, shallow, conceited, ignorant, believing-in-nothing London cockney is the most degraded and contemptible of all God's creatures—if such he may properly be called.

Then he set out to climb the Chilterns, keeping to the right of the great white cross which, cut on the chalk slope, is visible all the way from Oxford. The conditions were not favourable for his last look round. A pale mist hung along the hills; the wintry woods and hedges were colourless, but for here and there a bit of green holly or russet beech; the sky was monotonously gray. And yet when he reached the top, and turned to regard the great plain stretched out beneath him—with its farmhouses, and fields, and copses, and roads all phantom-like in the prevailing haze—it was with not a little regret that he knew this was a leavetaking. He had a great affection for England; if he was born a Scotchman, it was in England he had lived the most of his life, and done the best of his work. And who more faithfully than himself had studied her moods and ways—and communed with her in secret places—and got to know her elusive charm? For the beauty of English landscape has subtleties that none but the painter knows; and it is only after patient habitude that these are revealed even to him; often enough, moreover, when he has caught and transferred to paper or canvas something of this coy graciousness, the result is quite disappointing to the ordinary

spectator, accustomed to the obvious characteristics of Italian terraces, Swiss mountains, Highland glens, and the like. The chromo-lithographer is not at home in the English counties—or, at best, he goes up to Westmoreland, where he can get a nice, handy, portable edition of lake and mountain scenery, all within easy compass, and all of guaranteed prettiness.

Up here, on the summit of the hill, the roads were filled with snow and half-melted ice, which made it difficult walking; so, where it was practicable, he made a path for himself through the leafless beech-woods. It was strangely still in these solitudes; there seemed to be no work going on at any of the farms; the remotest sounds were plainly audible in the hushed air. His own footsteps, too, were noiseless on the yielding carpet of withered leaves; there was not a sign of life anywhere except when a jay fled shrieking through the branches, or a long-tailed magpie flapped its silent way across the fields. He could not have been more alone in the forests of Champlain.

He had carefully made out his route on the Ordnance Survey map before starting; and when at length he came in sight of a spacious mansion, standing at the summit of a noble avenue that sloped away down into the valley, he knew that this was Hampden House, and that here had lived the great Englishman whose refusal to pay Charles's ship-money had rung through the land as a summons to England to stand by her ancient rights and liberties. And

he wondered whether they had brought his body, after the fray at Chalgrove, to be buried here; and whether they had borne it, with solemn state, up this great and silent avenue. And he wondered, too—as a landscape-painter—where, except in England, one could find such an avenue: some three hundred yards he guessed its width, and over a mile its length; of velvet turf, where the snow allowed that to be visible, and planted on each side by magnificent beeches and Spanish chestnuts. Down this avenue he made his way to the Missenden road—startling a rabbit now and again from among the withered bracken and the snow. He knew that close by was the piece of land on which the ship-money was levied: had any one thought of erecting some kind of memorial to mark so interesting a spot?

However, it was neither John Hampden, nor the ship-money, nor the fatal Chalgrove field that was in his mind when he drew near the village of Missenden. The old-fashioned house, with its red-brick wall, and tall elm-trees, and laurestinus-bushes, was pointed out to him by a passer-by; he rang the bell, and was admitted by an elderly woman, who begged him to go into the drawing-room—Mrs. Foster would be with him presently. So there he waited; glancing at the portraits and sketches on the walls; rather struck by the old-world look of the furniture and the quaint decorations; and wondering whether Sabina had as yet had time to grow quite accustomed to the quietude of her new home.

The door opened; he turned instantly—and caught sight of a pair of eyes, timid, and yet shining and placid and grateful. And this was not at all the pale Sabina he had expected to see; there was a flush of rose-red on her face—the flush of a girl of seventeen; and she came to him quickly, with extended hand, as if her gladness at the sight of him had overcome her embarrassment.

'It is very kind of you,' she said, simply. 'Janie gave me all the messages you sent—and—and that was only more of your goodness to me; but when I heard you were going away, well, I—I—wanted to see you yourself, to make sure that you did really forgive me——'

'Yes, but we are not going to speak of that any more,' said he, gravely. 'That is all over and gone. Janie must have told you that I understood the whole situation perfectly.'

'And I am not even to thank you for being so kind?'

'There is no kindness in the matter; there may be a little common sense. Now, tell me—are you quite comfortable here? Do you like the place?'

'Yes, indeed,' she answered. 'They do everything they can think of for me, and one day is just like another; it is a peaceful life; and I wish for nothing better. Only,' she added, with downcast eyes, 'it is—very—far away—from Witstead.'

He knew what she meant; but he understood that Janie had undertaken to tend the little grave there.

'And you,' she said, 'why are you going away from England, after being home so short a time?'

Well, he began and gave her his reasons, or excuses, for going; and told her of all his plans and projects; and made the matter as cheerful as might be. Then she asked him to go into the dining-room, where old Mr. Foster, whose rheumatism was pretty bad, was seated; and they had tea there, and further talk. It was pleasant to hear Sabina's voice. And sometimes there was a smile in her eyes. He began to think that in this quiet haven she might attain to some forgetfulness of the too ungenerous past; and that the years might bring to her at least a placid content. The garden visible through the window looked somewhat dismal at present; but spring was coming; he could see Sabina among the young blossoms—in a light print dress—a pair of gardener's shears in her hand—perhaps a touch of peach-colour in her cheek—and the bright sunlight on her golden-brown hair.

The gray of the afternoon deepened; the elderly woman brought in the lamps; and then he rose.

'I have to walk to Wycombe,' he said, 'and I am not quite sure of the way—so I had better be going.'

'But you must not get astray in the dark,' Sabina said, anxiously. 'If you will wait a few minutes I will send over to the inn and get a conveyance for you—indeed, you must do that.'

'If you are not too proud to go in a pony-chaise,' old

Mr. Foster said, with a laugh, 'our lad can drive you across: I'm sure the cob doesn't get half enough exercise in this weather.'

'Oh, thank you, I could not think of troubling you; but I think what Miss Ze—Mrs. Foster says is quite right—I shouldn't like to miss my way—so I'll go into the inn in passing and get a trap to take me over. I may catch an earlier train too at Wycombe.'

He spoke rapidly and confusedly; he hoped neither of them had noticed the half-stumble. But indeed she had been looking so young, and speaking in a pleased way, as in the olden days—and, also, perhaps, he was rather bewildered by the knowledge that now he was about to bid her farewell, probably for many years. He was a little breathless when he found that she came out after him into the hall.

'Mr. Lindsay,' she said—and she stood facing him in the lamplight, but with her eyes downcast—'good-bye is easily said; but if you are going away—perhaps for some years—well, I should like you to think sometimes that I don't forget, that I never, never can forget, what your friendship has been to me. Would you take a little keepsake from me—just to remind you? It was my grandfather's—my mother gave it to me.'

She timidly offered him the trinket. It was an old-fashioned ring—red gold and garnets.

He held her hand in his; and for a second he could not thank her at all.

'It will be a reminder, will it not,' she said, 'that I have not ceased to be grateful to you for all your kindness to me?'

'And if you only knew how I value it—and how I shall value it many thousands of miles away.' He did not trust himself to say more. 'Good-bye, and God bless you!'

She opened the door for him; he looked once at the tender eyes; and then was gone.

CHAPTER XLVII

A KNELL OF DOOM

One evening towards nine o'clock Fred Foster called at the Northern Counties Hotel, Jermyn Street, asked to see Mrs. Fairservice, and was shown upstairs to her sitting-room. Apparently she had just finished dinner; dessert was still on the table; and she had gone to the fireplace, before which she was standing, with an evening paper in her hand. She was smartly dressed; her yellow hair resplendent; and she wore a string of brilliants round her neck.

'I'm glad you've come,' she said, throwing aside the paper. 'I've plenty to tell you. And to have a jock dining with you who can neither eat, nor drink, nor speak a word unless you get it out of him with a corkscrew, isn't much fun. And I've plenty to talk about too. There, help yourself to some wine—the cigars are on the top of the piano.'

She seemed a little bit excited.

'Then that was Joe Cantly I passed in the hall?' he said.

'Yes. He's off to King's Cross.'

'I thought it looked like his figure; but he went by quickly. Well, what's the news?' he asked, pouring out some champagne with no very steady hand.

'Why, just the same old news, neither more nor less,' she said; but there was a smile of triumph about the thin, hard lips, and in the steely-blue eyes. 'Everything is going beautiful; and if I haven't got hold of Charlie Bernard this time, it's pretty queer. Oh, I don't say you haven't done your share well enough; but when my friend Charlie goes smash, he'll have a pretty good guess who did the trick for him. And what a slice of luck it was!—the moment Joe Cantly confessed to me that I'd better not back Master of Roy, I suspected what they were up to. "Why, Joe," I said, "it's a moral, if that horse is ridden fair, and you know it is." He wouldn't answer that. "You're going to lose the race; is that Bernard's little game?" says I. But no, the mummified little creature wouldn't say one thing or another. If you only knew the trouble I had to corkscrew the truth out of him; and indeed it was only nods and winks he would give. And how cleverly they have managed it! Who would imagine that Charlie Bernard, openly backing Master of Roy to win the Lincolnshire Handicap—and the stable-money on too—was laying against the horse by commission, quietly and gently, but taking everything the public felt inclined to offer. And we are in that public, Master Freddie,' she continued, with a laugh. 'We are amongst the poor innocent gulls. We

are putting our little bits on; and every one knows the favourite will win; and we're rejoicing at the prospect of the golden sovereigns being handed over, when behold! something goes wrong with Master of Roy, or Joe Cantly does a little bit of roping, and he's down at the foot of the poll or out of it altogether. The Jockey Club make a fuss; and there is a talk in the newspapers; but nothing can be proved; and in the meantime Charlie Bernard has scooped in the guineas and put himself on his legs again. Very good; that's all right.'

She rang the bell for some tea.

'I told you all the way through that Bernard was a fool,' she continued, talking rapidly and excitedly. 'His run of good luck turned his head—he thought he couldn't do wrong; then, when things did go a little bit bad with him, he lost his head the other way, and began plunging to recover himself. South African diamond mines! Do you think I should have let him touch South African diamond mines if I had had anything to do with his affairs? I couldn't have helped all his ill-luck; I couldn't have helped Trigonella going dead lame—puff went twelve hundred guineas then; but I could have told him to keep to things he knew something about. All the better for me now. He is just walking blindfold into the trap I have set for him; and when it snaps on his ankle he'll think the heavens and the earth have come to an end: 100 to 14—that's tidy odds to lay against the favourite. Listen.' She took up the paper.

'"Master of Roy continues to grow in public appreciation; and Mr. Bernard is confident in his ability to win." But it's a deal safer to bet on his losing, if you can trust your jockey to rope him. Poor Joe!—you wouldn't believe the trouble I've had with him. He has always been on the square, he maintained. "Very well," says I, "why should I have any bother about persuading you to ride this race honest?" "It will be selling the guv'nor," says he, pulling a melancholy face. "Hang the guv'nor!" says I. "That's my tip—straight. Serves him right for trying to swindle the British public. What can he do to you? Nothing. You ride the horse to win; and win it must and shall: what can he complain of? Would he like to have you round on him? And can't you have your excuse ready? Tell him you meant to pull the horse—but that it got the mastery of you at the finish—anything you like: do you think he would dare to say a word? Not he!" Goodness me, the trouble I had to get a jock to promise to ride fair, who had been up till now as innocent as a babe—according to his own account! But I did it. I've got Joe Cantly as safe as the bank. And it isn't only the four thousand to nothing the horse wins—though that is a tidy little sum in itself. I've got him, I tell you—he won't play hanky-panky with me.'

She had been becoming more and more vehement, and her eyes were sparkling.

'I can see his face. Charlie Bernard is the worst loser

I ever saw. I hope the barmaid will be with him—that would be best of all—and of course he'll be pretending that he is cocksure Master of Roy will come romping in—perhaps he'll be backing him for a little bit—just to show off—and make people certain that everything is fair and straight. Then he'll watch them come sweeping along—quite indifferently, you know—oh yes, quite indifferently—until the crowd takes up the cry—"Master of Roy! Master of Roy!"—my heavens, I can see his face this moment!'

In her vehemence she snapped in two the paper-cutter she was holding in her hands; she flung the fragments in the fire. And then she turned angrily towards her companion, 'Why don't you speak! Good heavens, man, you are as bad as the jock! Haven't you got anything to say?'

Thus admonished, Fred Foster put aside his cigar for the moment; he did not seem in an alert mood.

'It will be a facer for Charlie Bernard,' he said.

'A facer?' she repeated scornfully. 'It will be eternal smash—that's more like it. And you think he will be able to weigh in on settling day? I think not. I think there will be a few little arrangements and some trifling arrears. I'll tell you what I should like to see some day—Charlie Bernard presenting himself with his jockey at the scales, and having slipped before his nose a nice little telegram from Messrs. Weatherby to the Clerk of the Course, saying that until the previous forfeits are paid, Mr. Bernard had

better return to his own humble domicile. That's what they call a *dénouement;* and home he goes, horse, and jock, and all, and beats the barmaid out of spite. Well, I can't talk about it any more just now—it kindles me up a bit too much. Talk about something else. Where's your wife?'

'I told you,' he said, rather sulkily. 'She is staying with my father in Buckinghamshire.'

'Does he believe you're a dead and buried corpse?'

'No, of course not. What had he to do with it?'

'It was a pretty dangerous prank to play, my friend.'

'I was desperate,' he mumbled. 'And it served my turn anyway. It's wonderful how amenable people become when you can show them a bit of the ready in your hand. I might have had more, too, but for the little chap dying—another stroke of bad luck—then she threw the whole thing up, and that game was played out. But it served me at the time.'

'Well,' she said, in a mocking way, 'there's nothing I like so much to see as displays of natural affection. It's so awfully innocent and nice. I remember when I met you at Scarborough, I couldn't help laughing when you told me you were a papa. Master Freddie Foster a papa! And I wondered how you would support the character. But I suppose you really were sorry when the boy died—when you found you couldn't screw any more money out of your father-in-law.'

'You may as well leave my domestic relations alone—they've got nothing to do with you.'

'Oh, you needn't be ill-tempered about it,' she said, with an affectation of gaiety. 'Come, let's hear what you're going to do when the great haul comes off. Settle up all round, go down and pacify the old man, turn farmer and grow mangold? Really I don't think you could do better. You'll never do much at the great game. You get frightened. Here, when you could get on Master of Roy at 100 to 8, you were still hesitating about every miserable fiver——'

'Well, there's no more hesitation now,' said he, rather blankly. 'Every farthing I could beg or borrow is launched in this swim; and, I must say, Johnny Russell stood by me like a man. Deane, too—well, it's wonderful how they believe in you when you can put your hand in your pocket and show them a few sovereigns.'

'What are you going to do, then, when it comes off?' she repeated. 'Is it to be the same old game?'

'The first thing is this,' said he. 'I've had a pretty baddish time of it for the last year or eighteen months—a rat in a drain-pipe sort of existence. Well, when I find myself on my legs again, I think I shall be entitled to a little amusement——'

'And there's only the one place in Europe for that,' said she, promptly, 'and that's Monte Carlo. Did you ever find a quarter of an hour hang heavy on your hands there? I never did. In the daytime walks and drives in

that delicious air—or boating—or pigeon-shooting for you; music in the afternoon; promenade-concerts in the evening; watching the tables, and putting on a five-franc piece now and again just for fun. The hotels are not dear; you meet the most interesting people—well, I call it just a heavenly place, if you have strength of neck enough to keep back from gambling. And I thank a merciful Providence for having screwed on my head pretty straight.'

'Are you going?'

She laughed.

'Yes—in one of two capacities. If everything comes off all right—well, it won't be quite a fortune for me, for my bet of four thousand to nothing with Joe Cantly will have to come out of it; but it will be a tidy sum; and I shall treat myself to a bit of a spree. Then take it the other way. Supposing that my faithful jock should after all play the rogue, or supposing that Master of Roy should come lumbering along the Carholme Mile at the tail-end of the lot——'

'Oh, what is the use of your talking like that!' he said testily.

She looked at him with a kind of compassionate scorn.

'You haven't got the nerve of a mouse—unless when you're half stupefied with chloroform, or whatever it is you're killing yourself with. Well, I like to face things. I consider myself rather a woman of business, don't you know. And you may be sure that I have made my

little dispositions; so that if by some horrible mischance the worst comes to the worst, I shan't be quite dead-broke. Next Wednesday will find me at the Lord Warden Hotel at Dover—I shall have a telegram in the afternoon—if it is not satisfactory—well, I vacate the premises: that's all.'

She glanced at him again.

'What will you do?'

'In that case? I can't think of it!' he said, with haggard eyes. 'I wish these next few days were over. It's maddening work, waiting on and on; and you can't drive the hours a bit faster. It's at night that it's most horrible—I don't believe I ever sleep more than half an hour at a time; and every time I wake it's with a start, and a fancy that some one is in the room bringing some frightful news.'

'And yet you go on taking that beastly stuff!' she said.

'If I didn't, I shouldn't get any sleep at all,' he answered gloomily. 'But this won't last.'

'No, it won't,' she said significantly.

'I mean that after next Wednesday there will be no need of it. I shall pull round after that—get away somewhere—take more exercise, and that kind of thing. It is merely anxiety that has been a little too much for my nerves—there will be no anxiety at Monte Carlo, if I should follow you there—except over a five-franc piece, as you suggest.'

'I wouldn't advise your going much to the tables, even as an onlooker,' she observed.

'Did I risk a single napoleon when I was over there that last time?' he demanded.

'No, probably not; but there were reasons why you should save up every farthing. So you are thinking of coming over to Monte Carlo too? That is, of course, if we pull this thing off successfully. But if not?'

'It's no use talking about that,' he said peevishly.

'Haven't you the courage to face the possibility?' she said, as a sort of taunt.

'You have—because you are perfectly certain that Master of Roy is going to win. You can face twenty dozen possibilities when you don't believe in them. But what is the use of talking about them?'

'They may be hocussing the horse at this very minute,' she said.

'Why, they are taking precautions about him as if he were first favourite for the Derby—it's quite notorious. Part of Charlie Bernard's game, of course; the public are sure of a winner this time, and they are to be led on: 100 to 14—it's swinging odds to have to pay up.'

'Yes, but suppose the backers are bit, after all?' she insisted. 'What will you do then, my poor Freddie? What refuge will you fly to from the wrath to come?'

'It's my last chance in England,' he said, gloomily. 'If it doesn't go right, then I'm off for good. I suppose Jack Russell would pay my passage to Australia.'

'Australia?' she repeated. 'What good would you

do there? In Australia they want people who can work.'

Then suddenly she altered her tone.

'Come, come, I won't torment you any more. I only wanted to see how far down into your boots you could get, or you can get farther than any human creature I know. Wake up, man! What's the matter with you? Or what's the matter with the champagne that you won't touch it? Has it gone flat? Never mind, let's see if we can't find something more to your mind.'

She went to the cellaret in the sideboard, and got out some brandy, and brought over the cigars.

'There,' she said, 'help yourself. And I will make my humble apologies for frightening you. Of course it's all right. Did a jockey ever get such a chance before?—£4000 for riding honest! Of course you'll see Master of Roy come romping in—or rather, you'll hear—for I don't suppose you are going down to Lincoln, are you? And don't imagine that I mean to cross the Channel if it comes off all right—not at once, I mean. Oh no! I'm coming back to London. I want to hear how things are going with Master Charlie. I should like to take a run down to Doncaster, and go driving about, on the chance of seeing the barmaid. Not that I care a pin-point—a barmaid!—he's welcome; and so is she—to all the diamonds she'll ever get out of the South African mines. Don't they want crushers for that work?—she might go out there and use

her feet—saving of labour. And if Charlie Bernard can't guess who landed him, he's a bigger fool than I take him to be—and that is something considerable.'

'I wish next Wednesday was come and gone,' Fred Foster said.

She regarded him with rather a contemptuous glance. 'Better go home and sleep till then,' was her curt advice.

'I wish I could,' he said.

And then he rose to go.

'Don't you come to see me again until the race has been run,' said she. 'If it goes all right I will hurry back to town at once—you will find me here. And until then mind you keep a quiet tongue in your head.'

She pressed another cigar on him, and he left—making away for his obscure lodgings in Fetter Lane.

How these intervening days passed he himself probably knew but little. The few companions whom he casually met had got an inkling that he stood to lose or win everything on the issue of the Lincolnshire Handicap; and those of them who had any interest in him hoped that, if he was backing the favourite, he had taken care to hedge a little, for Charlie Bernard's phenomenal run of luck had of late deserted him in a remarkable manner. And they accepted for what they were worth Foster's assurances that it was only persistent sleeplessness that had driven him to chloral, chlorodyne, morphia, or whatever was the remedy he sought: it was but a temporary aid; as soon as he could get away,

he would be all right again. In the meantime he was a pitiable-looking object—pallid, nerveless, apprehensive, bemused, and hollow-cheeked. He was 'keeping himself up,' he said, until he could get away.

The Wednesday came. In the morning papers Master of Roy was still quoted as first favourite; and the prophets were almost unanimous in approving the public fancy. Mrs. Fairservice was certainly confident; for in the simple gaiety of her heart—and without rhyme or reason—she sent him a telegram from Dover: 'Keep up your pecker, old man.' He drank some brandy and smoked hard to make the hours go by.

Long before the hour appointed for the race, he went out and down into the Strand, where he kept aimlessly and feverishly walking to and fro, gazing blankly into shop-windows or reading play-bills at the theatre-doors. But as the time drew near these wanderings were more and more circumscribed; until he hardly went more than a stone's-throw east or west of the window of a certain news agency. A small crowd had already collected there on the pavement, hanging loosely about, and evidently waiting for the news. He kept away from those people as well as he could; though his eyes would incessantly go back to the window, with far more dread than hope, so terribly anxious was he. Then a large white sheet was put up, and a murmur went through the crowd. He walked quickly forward. What was this sound that chilled him to the heart?—'Stagdyke!'

said one; and 'Stagdyke!' they seemed all to be repeating.

Another step forward, and the great splashed letters in ink were only too terribly legible—staring him in the face. This was what his burning and throbbing eyes beheld—

LINCOLN HANDICAP.

Stagdyke	1
Rebellion	2
Master of Roy	3

The small crowd melted away almost immediately; he was left standing on the pavement, bewildered, incapable of movement, not even perceiving that he was in the way of the passers-by. It seemed as if he hardly knew what had befallen him. Then, in a stunned and blind way, he managed to cross the busy thoroughfare, and entered a public-house, where he said he would like to sit down for a moment. They brought him a chair at once; and he had just taken hold of the back of it when a giddiness came over him, and he sank helplessly to the floor.

It was but for a second. The potman helped him to his feet again and brushed the saw-dust from his coat, and Foster seemed to try to pull himself together. He did not sit down. He ordered a bottle of brandy, for which he paid, and then asked them to get him a four-wheeled cab. He gave the cabman his address in Fetter Lane; and in a few minutes was left at the door of his lodgings.

CHAPTER XLVIII

NIGHT FALLS

About mid-day on the following Saturday, Mr. John Scott called at these lodgings in Fetter Lane, and was admitted by the landlady, who forthwith began her protestations and complaints and entreaties.

'No, I don't want no rent; I want to see him out o' my 'ouse, that's what I want; I have my other lodgers to consider; and every one of us expecting to be burned alive in our beds some night. You said as you was going to take him away yesterday and the day before——'

'I'll get him away as soon as I can,' the big, good-natured-looking man said, taking her remonstrances quite as a matter of course. 'Do you mean to say he has never stirred out?'

'Stirred out? Where do you think he would get the drink, then? And I'd have kep' him out, but I couldn't lock the door against the other lodgers; and would he give up his latch-key?—not he—he's that cunning, for all he doesn't know no more what he's doing than the babe unborn. He was crying yesterday! lor, such a silly; said

his mother died this time last year—what do I know about his mother, or care either? I don't believe a word of it—it was all a trying on, to get Polly to go out for some more gin. Well, what I say is this—I'll stand it no longer, and if you don't get him out o' this 'ouse, I'll get in a p'leeceman as will. We don't want to be burned in our beds—and I don't ask for no rent—I want him out o' this 'ouse afore he sets it on fire, that's what I want and mean to have.'

'Very well, very well,' John Scott said suavely. 'I'll get him away if I can.' And therewith he proceeded to climb the narrow and dusky stairs slowly and cautiously, as became one of his bulk. When he opened the door of the small apartment he found that the blind of the solitary window was down and the gas was burning. Foster lay at full length on the bed, his clothes on, his face downward on his hands. John Scott went forward and touched his shoulder, and then shook him slightly. 'Here, man, wake up! Haven't you come to your senses yet?'

Another shake, and Foster slowly turned and raised his head, and regarded his visitor with dazed, stupefied eyes, that yet had some vague look of terror in them. 'What do you want?' he said, in a thick voice.

'Sit up and I'll tell you,' Scott said, and he pulled him up by the shoulders. 'I've been trying these two days to get something hammered into your head, and it hasn't been much use. I wonder if you'll understand now. Do you know that there's a warrant out against you?'

'I don't care,' he said wearily, 'they can take what they like—I've nothing——'

'Bless my soul, can't you understand the difference between a writ and a warrant? It's a warrant, I tell you, and the warrant-officer is on the look-out for you. Don't you know you are wanted for that affair at the American Bar?'

The big Yorkshireman eyed him curiously; but there was no kind of intelligence in the vacuous, hopeless, pallid face. All that Foster said—with a sort of feeble impatience—was, 'What do you want here? What time of the night is it?'

'Time of the night? It's the middle of the day, man! Here, I'll put out the gas—the smell of it is sickening—and let some light into the room.'

He did as he said, Foster following his movements with listless observation.

'What day is it?' he asked, when the dull London light streamed into the room.

'I like that!' the other said. 'Don't know the day of the week! It's Saturday, then.'

'Saturday?' Foster repeated vacantly; and yet he seemed to be thinking too. 'Then yesterday was the nineteenth?'

'No mistake about that.'

'The nineteenth,' he said absently; and he was staring right before him, and taking no heed of his visitor. 'That

was the day I was to start afresh—and I was to go down to Missenden—yesterday, was it?—gone by—gone by.'

John Scott came over to him.

'Look here, Freddie, you've got into trouble, though you don't seem to know it; and I mean to do the best I can for you; but it's no good unless you try to pull yourself together. Do you understand?'

Well, his intelligence seemed to grasp this idea.

'Yes, yes, that's all right,' said he, with incoherent earnestness. 'That's all right. You're a good fellow, Scott. I'm listening. All I want is a drop of something to steady my nerves.'

He rose, and with trembling gait was making for the cupboard when the Yorkshireman interposed his capacious bulk.

'No, you don't. Now that I've caught you in a half-sensible state, you've got to keep so until we decide what has to be done.'

'It's no use, then,' Foster said helplessly. 'I can't listen to you. I feel like death. I wish you'd go away and leave me to myself.'

His visitor hesitated. Perhaps what he said was true.

'Well, one nip,' he said, and stood aside.

Foster went to the cupboard, quickly poured out half a tumblerful of some white fluid and drank it off before the other could interpose. Then he went back to the bed and sat down. It seemed to concern him little now what his visitor had to say.

'That was a stiffish dose, but I hope it will pull you together; you'll have to have your wits about you, unless you want to be laid by the heels,' Scott said. 'So you understand, now, that there is a warrant out against you, and that you'll have to get clear away from London like greased lightning, or you'll be up at Marlborough Street?'

'Oh, what are you talking about?' Foster said peevishly, and yet in an absent way; he did not seem to be paying much attention.

'Upon my soul, I don't believe you know one thing that has occurred during these three days!' John Scott exclaimed. 'Do you mean to say you can't remember what happened on Wednesday night at the American Bar!'

'What American Bar?' he said indifferently.

'At the Palladium. Well, perhaps not. But you seemed to understand yesterday when I was here. I wonder whether you'll understand now—sufficient to make you get up and quit this place. You mean to say, you haven't the least recollection of the whole thing—coming into the American Bar with Jim Deane—quarrelling with him about paying for the drinks—and making such a row that the barman had to interfere?'

'Oh well, I daresay I had a drop. It's all right,' he muttered.

'It isn't all right! I suppose you don't remember catching up the knife the barman had been cutting lemon-peel with—will that bring you to your senses? I don't

know—at least, I don't want to be certain—whether you struck him with the knife, or whether he stumbled against it in the scuffle; but anyhow we got you hustled out and into a cab; and Jim Deane had sufficient *nous* to give them your Wellington Street address, when he said you would answer to the charge. Now do you understand?—that there's a warrant out against you—and I suppose the charge is cutting and wounding, or whatever the lawyers call it—and unless you quit out of this place at once, they'll be down on you.'

The warning seemed to make little impression.

'It doesn't matter,' he said listlessly. 'It's all over with me now. I'm done for—they may hang me if they like. The luck's been against me—it's no use trying any longer. I thought I was going to have one more chance; and yesterday was the day—the 19th of March it was my mother died—she was the only one that ever cared for me—and when she died it was all up with me—the 19th of March—that was the day I was going to start afresh—if I had had this one more chance. But the luck's been dead against me.'

'Look here,' said his visitor, roughly, 'instead of maundering on like that, you'd better wake up and settle where you can hide yourself for a time. Have you any friends abroad? Or where was it you retired to in Yorkshire?'

He did not answer. He was vacantly staring at nothing;

and the spirit he had drunk seemed to be rendering him more and more maudlin.

'I meant to have gone down to Missenden,' he continued, in his husky voice, with his head hanging down on his chest. 'I meant to have taken an oath on my mother's grave—if I had got this last chance—and I'd have tried to make up to them for all that's past. Well, it's no use now. The game's played out. It's all over with me.'

'And what do you propose to do, then?' Mr. Scott asked, with obvious sarcasm. 'Sit here till the warrant-officer comes? Then you're up at Marlborough Street. Who's going to become your bail, do you think? Perhaps you consider your own recognisances would be enough? I don't imagine the magistrate would, though. I don't think prison-life would suit you, my lad, in this cold weather; and there would be mighty little unsweetened gin going. Come, come, man, wake up, and clear out of this neighbourhood, to begin with—whatever you do next.'

He pulled him from the bed on to his legs; and Foster obediently began to smooth his ruffled clothes and get ready for departure.

'What am I going to do next?' he said, in the midst of these haphazard preparations. 'What do you think I should do? What is there left me to do? Well, I am not going to tell you. But there's a way of making it up to them. I wish I had done it before, when my mother died; but I thought I had one more chance. Yes, you'll

see. My wife was frightened that time I went down. I said, "You're a strong woman, but you're not strong enough for—this."'

'What are you blethering about now?' the blunt Yorkshireman said. 'Come, let's settle where you will go, to begin with, when you leave this house. Wandering about London streets isn't the safest thing for you at present.'

'What o'clock is it?' he asked.

'Just after two.'

'Then I know where I am going,' he said, with a kind of maudlin determination. 'You come up to Holborn with me, and you'll see.'

'Oh, you know, do you? Well, that's a comfort, at any rate.'

Just as they were about to leave, Foster turned and went to the cupboard. His companion caught him by the arm.

'No, not one drop!'

'Oh, let me alone!' Foster said peevishly, and he tried to shake off the hold. 'It's medicine I want.'

'Let me see, then.'

He opened the cupboard and took out a small phial, which he instantly put in his pocket.

'What are you taking medicine for?'

'When I can't get sleep.'

'What? Sleeplessness? Is that what ails you? You've been asleep for three days!'

'It cures other things,' Foster said gloomily. 'Cures everything, for the matter of that.'

'That's something like a medicine, now!' Scott said encouragingly. 'Can it cure impecuniosity?—for that's what most of us are suffering from since Joe Cantly roped Master of Roy—the infernal whelp! Well, they'll stop his playing that little trick again, or I'm mistaken.'

They were getting down the dark staircase by this time. When they got outside, Foster shivered with the cold, and his shaking legs could scarcely carry him along. He seemed rather terrified, too, at the number of faces regarding him; he kept his eyes fixed on the pavement, and answered his companion in monosyllables.

As they were walking along Holborn, Foster suddenly stopped in front of an archway, and held out his hand to his companion.

'Good-bye,' he said, with averted eyes.

'What do you mean?' Scott said.

'I am going down into the country,' he answered; but his maudlin resolve had now dropped into a kind of listlessness.

'Going into a public-house, you mean.'

'There is an omnibus starts from here at three,' he said, without taking any offence.

John Scott glanced through the archway, and saw that in the middle of the courtyard of the old-fashioned inn there was undoubtedly an omnibus standing, though as yet the horses were not put to.

'Oh, I see. The one that goes down into Buckinghamshire? So you are going to your own people down there? Well, now, that's very sensible—the very best thing you can do. You be quiet there for a time, and pick yourself up again; then you'll be able to look round and see what should come next. The very best thing you can do. Good-bye, old chap, and Jim Deane and I will see whether we can't square that blessed barman.'

So they shook hands; and John Scott went on his way; and Foster, with a strangely apprehensive look—as if he feared to meet some familiar face—passed through the courtyard, and entered the taproom, where he sat down in a dusky corner to wait until the omnibus was ready to start.

In due course of time, the handful of passengers—mostly elderly country-folk burdened with innumerable baskets and parcels and packages—who were going by the omnibus were summoned to take their places; and Foster rose and went out too. The first person he saw was the driver—an old and familiar acquaintance of his from boyhood upward. The stout, rubicund, wholesome-looking man seemed much surprised and concerned.

'Lor a mussy, Mr. Fred, how poorly you do look, to be sure. Be you going with us?—ay?—and the box-seat at your will and pleasure; but you'll take a drop of something before ye start, just to keep the cold out, won't ye?'

'I'm going inside,' Foster said, shivering a little; and

he got into the vehicle, and went up to the farthermost corner, where he huddled himself together. If any of the other passengers knew who he was, they did not speak; he had not even glanced at them. And presently, no doubt, they thought that the sickly-looking young man in the corner was asleep, for apparently his eyes were closed.

The old omnibus jogged placidly along, away out by Acton and Ealing and Hanwell, stopping now and again to deliver its parcels at the wayside houses. At Uxbridge there was a longer halt; and here Foster got out and went into the tavern, and drank some hot gin and water. He did not, according to usual custom, ask the driver to join him; he went back to his corner, and to his stupefied meditations. The wintry afternoon was darkening now.

They went on by Chalfont St. Peter's and Chalfont St. Giles's. The lamp inside the omnibus had been lighted by this time, and the dull orange glow fell on the sallow and sickly features of the solitary traveller, who seemed to huddle himself away from his fellow-passengers. At Amersham, however, he again got out, and had some more gin; the landlady, to whom he was known, expressing the greatest concern over his altered appearance. Indeed, he seemed scarcely to understand what he was doing; and there was a furtive look about his eyes—dazed as they were—as if he thought he was being watched.

At length, about nine o'clock at night, he arrived at his destination. But he did not go on to his father's house;

he alighted at the inn at which the omnibus stopped; and went inside, and asked the people, who knew him very well, for a bedroom for the night.

'Why, Mr. Foster, baint you going on home?' the landlord said, in great astonishment.

'No, I'm not,' he said huskily. 'I don't want to disturb them. I don't want them to know I'm in Missenden—do you understand? I'm going out for a while. Have the bed ready by the time I get back.'

'And about supper, sir?' said the landlady.

'I don't want any. I haven't been very well. It's sleep I want.' And therewith he went out into the dark of the night.

But the landlord, who had known the Foster family for years and years, was sorely disquieted; he did not like the look of the young man's appearance nor his strange manner; and after a hurried consultation with his wife, he put on his hat and went quickly out into the darkness. He could see the way that Foster had taken, and he followed, keeping a certain distance between him and the black figure ahead. He went down the main thoroughfare of the village; then got away from the houses; and then began to ascend the little hill on which the church is built. Here, away from the yellow light of the windows, one could see better; the stars overhead were clear; there was a crescent moon, too, down in the south; the friendly watcher had no difficulty in following the movements of

the young man who had awakened his suspicions, if not his alarm. Then he almost took shame on himself when he saw what happened. Foster, feebly and slowly—for he seemed very weak—went up the steps of the churchyard, clinging to the handrail; he opened the little gate; he went forward—still more slowly, for there were one or two large yew-trees here that made the place dark—and knelt down by a grave. It was his mother's grave. And then the next moment he had flung himself at full length on the slab of stone, with sobs and moans and inarticulate cries, his face buried in his hands. The man who witnessed this terrible outburst of remorse and anguish withdrew hurriedly and stealthily. When he went back to his wife he would say no word. He put aside her questions; but she could see that something unusual had happened to him.

Fred Foster came back to the inn, looking more ghastly than ever; his eyes were sunken, and yet furtively apprehensive; his face was of an ashen gray. He said he would go to his room at once; he asked for two or three candles, in case he should be sleepless; and then he went upstairs and locked himself in.

'Good-night!' he had said to the girl who took the candles up to him; it was his last farewell to the world.

In the morning both the landlord and his wife were anxious to be relieved of the responsibility of having in their house any one who looked so terribly ill—especially

as his own home was but a short way off; and the former had some idea of himself going along and informing old Mr. Foster and his daughter-in-law. And then they thought they would wait and see what the young man had to say. They waited in vain. They knocked at his door; there was no answer. They knocked again, and yet again; the silence that followed was dreadful; then, taking courage, they drove in the door. There was a dark figure lying on the bed; a curious odour in the air; and an empty phial on the dressing-table at the window. This, then, was the end.

And yet a charitable view was taken of the circumstances in which the body of this hapless mortal was found. It was shown that he had been dreadfully ill; that he suffered from sleeplessness; that the object of his coming to Missenden was to visit his mother's grave on the anniversary of her death—or, at least, on the day after that; and it was suggested as probable that the emotion and excitement of such a visit had rendered him wakeful during the night, and that he had taken an overdose of the narcotic he had been using for some time before. So the verdict of the coroner's jury was simply, 'Death by misadventure;' and there was no reason why any one should dispute it; the worthless life had been snuffed out; thereafter—silence.

CHAPTER XLIX

IN DARKNESS

It was more than a year after these occurrences, and it was on the morning of the Private View of the Royal Academy, that Sabina was in London, and in a room in Janie's house, dressing to go out. In fact, she was already dressed; but Janie was an assiduous and officious tire-woman, and would hardly let her beloved Sabie out of her hands. Again she would put straight the bonnet-strings beneath the chin, and adjust the bit of a veil; and then she had to fasten on, under the throat, a little bouquet of violets that had been presented by Mr. Philip.

'I'll show them something,' said Janie.

'Show whom?' her visitor asked.

'The people at the Academy. I suppose there will be Miss ——, and Mrs. ——, and the Swiss-American girl, what's her name? But I'm not afraid—not a bit. Do you know, Sabie, I do believe black suits you better than anything; and that's just a love of a bonnet! And I wish you could see for yourself how perfectly your dress fits—I mean when you walk; no credit to them either; it ought

to be easy enough to fit a figure like yours. Oh, there will be plenty of fine gowns there, no doubt; they can always attract attention that way; that's what I was saying to Phil this morning. "They may have as fine dresses as ever they please; but where is the one that will show a figure like our Sabie's?"'

'I thought we were going to see the pictures?' Sabina said innocently.

'Until the afternoon; then it's the people. We'll get all the stooping and crowding and worrying into corners over and done; and then you'll have nothing to do but see and be seen.'

'For an artist's wife, Janie,' her friend said, 'you don't seem to be going to this Private View in a proper frame of mind.'

'I see a good many pictures in the course of the year,' said Janie, as she stepped back a pace or two so that she could scan Sabina from head to foot. The result of this examination was obviously satisfactory. 'Yes. They may have dresses as stylish as ever they can make them, but I know who will be the most distinguished-looking woman in that crowd. Come along. It's too bad of Phil not to give up one morning; but he's very busy; he'll come along as soon as he can in the afternoon. And mind you, Sabie, you mustn't let any of the people take you away. You're going with us, mind.'

'My dear child, I hardly know a human being in

London now! I don't suppose there will be a soul in the place who will remember me.'

'And a good job, too,' said Janie stubbornly, 'for I want you all to myself.'

They got into the hansom that was awaiting them. It was a summer-like morning; even here in London the air was quite sweet and balmy. They had a pleasant drive in by Kensington Gardens and Piccadilly; and eventually reached Burlington House a few minutes after eleven.

As they entered the vestibule, Janie knew that her heart was beating a little more quickly than usual. She had not heard from Walter Lindsay for a very long time; and, indeed, had every reason to believe that he was still abroad; but once or twice the fancy had struck her that perhaps he might in some unexpected way turn up at this Private View. And the very first thing she did on receiving a catalogue from one of the attendants was to turn quickly to the list of exhibitors at the end of the little volume. It had always been Lindsay's custom to send in a water-colour to the Academy exhibition, chiefly for the sake of obtaining admission on Varnishing Day, which is an excellent day for going round the galleries. But to Janie's surprise she found that this year his name was absent from the list. She said no word, however. She kept her disappointment and her anxious surmises to herself.

They had a good steady two hours' work at the pictures; and then Jeanie marched her charge into the luncheon-room

and secured a couple of seats. For Janie was host now, and gave herself airs in consequence. Sabina was a visitor from the country, who hardly knew the ways of the town; and so she had to be taken about and shown things, and treated when occasion served, and petted always. Janie confessed to herself that she could not understand men. There was her husband, who might have been all that morning going about with the prettiest woman in the place, discussing the pictures with her, and talking to her as much as ever he chose, and who might at this very moment have been seated at this table making merry with them in the modest fashion allowed by the Academy; and instead of that he must needs keep labouring away at his allegorical and hungry virgins. No matter; there was the one faithful soul. She had Sabie all to herself. And she was very happy and very confident: they might produce what striking costumes they chose—she would say, 'Oh, get away with your purchased finery: look at my Beautiful One!'

There came along a tall, good-looking young fellow, whom Sabina seemed to recognise, though she could not recollect where she had seen him. He shook hands with Janie, and bowed to her companion.

'I had the pleasure of meeting you one night at Mr. Lindsay's two or three years ago,' he said, seeing that she looked puzzled; and then she had a vague remembrance of this being a young Associate who made one of a pretty

group of lads and lasses gathered round the piano and singing glees.

He turned to Janie.

'By the way, have you heard anything of Walter of late?'

'No, I have not,' she said, reddening a little as she looked up—for she did not mention Lindsay's name before Sabina more than she could help. 'I have only his New York address; and as he hasn't answered my last letter, I have no idea where he is. I must write again, for there may have been some mistake.'

'I heard the other day—I forgot who it was who told me—that there was something wrong with his eyes.'

'What?' she said, looking up again.

'I hope it is something of no importance,' he said. 'But for a landscape-painter to have his eyes go wrong, that's pretty bad luck. It's a serious thing for anybody—but for a landscape-painter——'

Janie looked a little bewildered and frightened.

'Now I remember,' she said, rather breathlessly, 'that the last letter I had from him was written in such a curious way—not like his ordinary handwriting. And it was very short too; whereas he used to write long letters, if he had been silent for some time. Only he did not say a word about anything being wrong with his eyes.'

'Perhaps it is a mistake,' he said. 'These reports do get into circulation and are exaggerated as they are passed along.'

He talked to her a few moments further about various matters, but her eyes were grave and absent. When he left she did not bring up Walter Lindsay's name again. Luncheon over, they returned to the pictures, and to the crowd, that was now sensibly increasing in numbers.

The afternoon passed without incident—excepting that Sabina encountered her father in this slow-moving assemblage. He came along bland, smiling, and loftily gracious, as usual, nodding to this side or that, as he recognised some one sufficiently distinguished to merit so much of notice. Sabina hesitated. They had not met since the time he went down to Witstead. She did not advance towards him; nor did she avoid him: she stood just a little bit withdrawn, so that he could treat her as he chose—passing on without recognition, if so it pleased him. And yet she looked timidly at him.

'Ha!' said he, as if she were some mere ordinary acquaintance. 'How de do? How de do?'

He offered her a couple of fingers; but he scarcely bestowed a look on her; his glance was far ahead of him, picking out the great of the land, with whom it pleased him to know that he was on such excellent terms. And then he went on again, of course taking no heed of Janie, who was not a distinguished person at all.

Philip Drexel had arrived in due course; and Janie took the first opportunity she could find—Sabina happened to

be engaged in conversation with some one who knew her —to say to her husband, and rather anxiously, 'Phil, do you remember the last letter we had from Walter Lindsay?'

'What about it?'

'Do you remember anything peculiar about the handwriting?'

'No.'

'They say there's something wrong with his eyesight,' said Janie, in an undertone.

'Yes I remember his saying his eyes sometimes bothered him a little.'

'Oh, he spoke to you about it?' Janie said, eagerly.

'Yes; I think it was when he was just back from America—there was some talking about sea-voyages, and he spoke of the glare of the water.'

'But it was nothing serious?' she said.

'Oh no; not at all.'

'What a fright I got!' said Janie, half to herself; but at this moment Sabina returned to them, and so no further mention was made of Walter Lindsay.

Now it was for this Private View that Sabina had prolonged her visit; consequently there was but the one more evening for these three to spend together before her return to Buckinghamshire. It was a very enjoyable evening, nevertheless; for the long-talked of tour in Scotland that Philip and his wife had been promising themselves year after year, had now been definitely fixed for the following

month; and they had very nearly persuaded Sabina to go with them as their guest; so that now there was nothing for it but to put a big map on the dining-room table, and discuss routes, and indulge in all kinds of imaginary sights and pleasures. Janie's mind ran mostly on mountains and remote islands set amid lonely seas; her husband was interested more in mediæval architecture, and ruins, and legends, and traditions. And he declared that, wherever else they might go, they must visit the Braes of Yarrow; for he had some notion of stealing a subject out of Hamilton of Bangour's pathetic ballad; and he wanted to see what the neighbourhood was like. It is to be guessed that it was not the youthful lover, in 'his robes, his robes of green,' that was in Mr. Philip's mind; nor yet the cruel slaughter done on Yarrow's banks. These things were hardly in his way: more likely he was thinking of a single female figure, dim and visionary, with a face grown white with grief, and eyes hollow and haunted with despair:

> '*Return, return, O mournful, mournful bride,*
> *Return, and dry thy useless sorrow;*
> *Thy lover heeds nought of thy sighs;*
> *He lies a corpse on the Braes of Yarrow.*'

Then behind this solitary figure a half-suggested landscape —vague and gray and shadowy—a darkened river—the fatal bank where she 'tint her lover, lover dear'—and beyond these the low-lying hills, sombre under the heavy sky, and receding into a mysterious gloom.

'Sabie,' said Janie, the next morning, at the door of the cab, 'make it a definite "Yes!"'

'I cannot; you are really too kind,' was Sabina's answer. 'I should be dreadfully in the way. Two's company; three's none. If it was a run down to Brighton, that might be all right; but a long travelling through Scotland! And then the expense: young married people like you shouldn't dream of such extravagances.'

'Then you deliberately mean to spoil my visit to Scotland?' said Janie.

'What can you mean?'

'You know well enough. It has been promised me all along that when we went to Scotland you should come with me; and what else did I think of? It's not the old abbeys I care for; it's having you with us. And now you deliberately say no. As for the expense—well, if Phil says he can afford it, and easily afford it, I suppose that is enough? And I never expected to hear you, Sabie, talk as if you were too proud to accept a small kindness from us: it isn't like you to talk like that—as between you and me.'

'You goose, I never said anything of the kind,' Sabie answered her good-naturedly. 'Well, I will think it over. And if I can bring myself to inflict so much trouble on you, then I will go as your maid, and you will let me travel third-class.'

'Yes, I think that would do very well,' Janie said, gravely.

'Only, I am afraid, in that case, Phil would very soon forsake the mistress for the maid. He would be too much in that third-class compartment. Now, Sabie, before you go—a definite "Yes!"'

'Really, I cannot, Janie, dear; but I will let you know—I must see how old Mr. Foster likes it.'

'Within a fortnight you will let me know?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'And then you will at once come up to town, and stay with us for a week, and get your travelling things ready?'

'I am afraid, if I do go, I shall have to do with what I have.'

'Ah, but you'll come up and see, Sabie!' her friend said, beseechingly. 'And we'll go to the Scotch place in Regent Street— Oh, shouldn't I like to see you in a long gray ulster, and a Tam o' Shanter—at Euston Square Station—walking up and down the platform. You would look so comfortable in it; and it would suit your tall figure, too. Sabie, I'm going to give you that for your birthday present.'

'What nonsense! But good-bye, Janie, good-bye—tell the man to look sharp, or I shall miss my train.'

For several days thereafter Janie expected every morning to hear from Missenden; but no message came; and she thought she must write again and urge Sabie to give her consent. However, something now occurred that changed the whole situation of affairs.

One morning she and her husband were seated at breakfast when a letter was brought to her. It was a bulky letter, and addressed in a schoolboy's hand; she had nearly thrown it into the fireplace, in the irritation naturally begotten by the receipt of a circular. Nevertheless, she mechanically opened the envelope, and glanced at the contents. Presently she turned to the signature: it was 'Walter Lindsay' she saw there, but not in his handwriting.

'Oh Phil, what's this!' she cried.

She began again at the first page, and read rapidly and breathlessly. Her husband was looking at her with some amazement. Presently he saw her lips begin to quiver; then her eyes filled with tears; then she rose.

'Read it, Phil—I—I can't,' she said, and turned and quickly left the room.

Yet this was no piteous communication that he was asked to glance through; on the contrary, it was written with an abundance of good-humour. Lindsay apologised, to begin with, for not having answered her letter long before; the fact being that it had been forwarded from New York to place after place, until it had finally reached him in the 'Kingdom of Galloway.' Then he went on: 'They say the wounded hare crawls home to die. Well, it is not quite as bad as that with me; but when I tell you that my eyesight has gone from bad to worse so that now all I can tell is the difference betwixt night and day, you will understand that it was but natural I should come back to

the old familiar place, where I can imagine my surroundings, if I cannot see them. And really I am very comfortable, and lead a pleasant enough life. The lad who writes these lines to you is a sharp-eyed fellow, with an admirable acquaintance with every bird and beast you may meet on a morning walk; and an eager sportsman, too, from firing at rabbits, which he never hits, to guddling trout in the burns; and I am as much interested in his performances as if they were my own. I have myself tried a little fly-fishing, with more or less success; but expect to be more at home in trolling with the phantom-minnow, if I can come across some good-natured fellow who has a salmon loch. Then I have books and newspapers read to me; and there is no lack of tobacco; and then we have long walks round the coast, or up on the hillsides, and my companion tells me how many birds there were in the covey that got up at our feet, or what kind of ships they are that are passing, and how far he thinks the horizon is off. So you see I have a good excuse for a life of inglorious ease; and I have but little right to complain; things might have been a good deal harder to bear. And as regards the operation they speak of at some future time, I am trying to prepare myself for the worst. This darkness came upon me by slow degrees, so that I got used to it in a measure; and I can look forward to a lifelong continuance of it without much dismay. There were one or two things, in the way of my work, I had thought to have attempted—

that is the only reflection that does trouble me a little at times; but I don't know that I should have done any better than I had done before; and what I have done must now speak for itself. For one thing, the critics may now look on me as a dead man; and they always say nicer things about you after you are dead.

'This is a very egotistical letter; but I thought you would like to know exactly how the case stands with me; and if any one should ask about me, you will be able to say that I am not at all given over to black moods of despair. And if you only knew how I long for news of any friends in whom you and I are mutually interested, I am sure that of your kindness you would send me a line. I would have written to you before, to beg that news of you, but have been trying hard to get quite thoroughly accustomed to my position and circumstances, so as to write in a fairly contented way. And I think I am content. I know I shall be more than content when you send me some bit of news. The smallest things told to me are full of interest—that there are yellow marsh-marigolds in the ditch by the roadside—that a hawk is hovering high in the air—that a blue kingfisher has just darted up the stream—or that a small white rabbit is lying asleep in the sun, just outside the parental burrow—all these little things are of the keenest interest, for they are so many messages from the great world of life and light and colour that is all around me, and that I may never see again. So you may imagine what news from

friends must be. Did I say that I would have written before, but that I waited until I was quite used to my surroundings? Tell Philip that if they should ask about me at the Arts Club, he may say that I am not repining over much.'

These were the pertinent passages; and Janie's husband was just finishing them when she returned to the room, her eyes red with crying.

'He is putting a very brave face on it,' said he. 'But any one can feel there is more than is set down here.'

'Oh, it is terrible—it is terrible,' she said, with a bit of a returning sob. 'Phil, what are you going to do?'

'Well, we shall be in Scotland anyway: don't you think we ought to go and see him?'

'Ah, I thought you would say that!' Janie exclaimed, and there was a soft gleam of pride and gratitude in her tear-filled eyes. 'And then—as for Sabie?'

She hesitated for but a moment; and it was herself who boldly made the answer, 'Well, if Sabie refuses to go to Scotland *now*—she is not the woman I took her for.'

CHAPTER L

IN THE KINGDOM OF GALLOWAY

JANIE was not long left in doubt.

'If you think he would like it,' Sabina wrote instantly, 'if you think it would be a little break in the monotony of his life or would serve to convince him how much we sympathise with him in his dreadful misfortune, I will go with you, and gladly. How can I ever forget his kindness to me in my darkest hours? And if that can never be repaid, surely the least I can do is to show him that I remember, and am grateful.'

Then there was a bustle of preparation in the house; for Janie's ideas about Scotland and about what was necessary for such a journey were of a vague description; perhaps she would hardly have been surprised if warned to take tinned meats with her in case of their being snowed up in June, or if Philip had been advised to purchase a rifle, on the chance of his getting a shot at a bear. However, Philip's first care was to ascertain that this visit would be agreeable to Walter Lindsay; and accordingly he wrote, saying they were coming round that way, and would like to see him,

and might perhaps, if there was a hotel in the neighbourhood, stay for a few days, and give him of their company if he cared for it. He added that Sabina was coming with them.

The answer showed how gratefully this proposal had been received.

'I have made my young friend here read your letter over several times, for it sounded too good to be true; but I am convinced at last; and you may be sure I understand why you think of coming to this out-of-the-way place. And we'll say nothing about a hotel, if you will put up with such accommodation as my poor house affords; and we will try to give you a Scotch welcome. It is an interesting neighbourhood; you will be able to plan plenty of excursions; and you needn't be afraid that I shall be a drag on you—I shall be glad enough when you come home in the evening. In the meantime it will be quite an occupation for me to make preparations for your coming; if I can't see what is going on, I shall be no worse off than the modern general who sits in his tent and conducts a battle from the reports sent in to him. I would telegraph for Mrs. Reid, to give us her additional assistance, but her face would remind Sabina of that sad time, so perhaps we shall be better without. By the way, I have once or twice been thinking of writing to you about my house and studio in London. Once upon a time I made a solemn vow never to sell them—because of certain associations.

But then I was earning a good income; now that I am earning nothing, it seems a useless piece of extravagance. Probably I shall never be in London again; and, considering this that has happened to me, I think I am entitled to absolution from that vow; so that if you should chance to hear of a likely tenant or purchaser, you might let me know.'

'Never to be in London again?' repeated Janie, when she read the letter. 'Does he think he would be such a trouble to his friends—a drag on them, he says? But he is hopeless because he is alone. When Sabie and you and I are all with him, we will try to cheer him up a little. And—and I hope Sabie will be kind!'

Then Sabina was summoned up from the country, to join in the general and joyful hurry of preparation for departure. But when she saw what Janie considered needful in the way of rugs, ulsters, waterproofs, and the like—and when she discovered that these good people, though far from being abundantly rich, were making no scruple about providing her with all of these—her conscience smote her. The cost of the travelling, too, would be great; why should she become such a burden upon them? The alternative was that she should go and ask her father for a renewal of the allowance which, he had formally intimated to her, still remained at her disposal. Perhaps, in other circumstances, she would even now have backed out of this proposed holiday, and contentedly gone down home

again to Buckinghamshire. But she wanted to go to Scotland—if her going would be taken as a kindness by one who was once kind to her, and was now sorely stricken —and so she put her pride in her pocket, wrote to her father, got an appointment to meet him at the Waldegrave Club, and went there and found him.

There were two well-known politicians passing through the hall while Sabina was standing there, talking to her father, and explaining her position. When they had got into the morning-room, and the glass door had swung behind them, the one said to the other, 'What a remarkably handsome girl that is talking to Anthony Zembra —did you notice her?'

'Why, don't you know who she is?' said the other.

'No.'

'His daughter, that's all.'

'How can that be? I have never seen her at the house?'

'Oh, she's married—or was married—or something,' his companion said indifferently. 'She doesn't live with family number two.'

Meanwhile, Sabina was being lectured in a cold fashion about the consequences of her evil ways. But when it came to the question of money, there was no difficulty. Sir Anthony pointed out to her that it was no wish of his that one of his daughters should be dependent on the bounty of any one; that her allowance was being punctually

paid her when she chose to relinquish it, from motives best known to herself; that it was still at her disposal; and that personally he should much prefer that no relation of his was in receipt of charity from any source whatever. For Sir Anthony liked to speak of his own motives, aims, circumstances, and position; and he seldom failed to convey to his interlocutor a sense of how far, far away from that high standard of integrity and prudence and conscientiousness he or she was. Sabina left the Waldegrave Club just a little bit humbled; but at all events she knew that now those kind people who were befriending her would not have to pay for her travelling equipment.

Then there came the joyous morning on which these three found themselves walking up and down the wide-sounding platform of Euston Station. A carriage had been reserved for them; Philip had stuffed it full of newspapers and magazines. And now Sabina (having yielded to Janie's insistence) was clad in an ulster of gray homespun, with a Tam o' Shanter of similar colour, and looked more like a Highland chieftainess than a Kensington-born young woman.

'Take your seats for the North!'

To some folk there is more music in these simple words than ever was put into any song or ballad. But these three travellers were, as a first stage, going no farther than Carlisle; and indeed knew little of what was before them.

'Look here,' said Mr. Philip, taking out his pocket-book

as soon as they were through the tunnels and into the clear daylight again; 'I was talking some little while ago to an American, over here for the first time, and he told me that what struck him most in England was the number of interesting things, historical and otherwise, that you find everywhere within a small compass. Go anywhere you like, he said—for a morning stroll—and there's always something. Now I wonder what he would say to this little run between Carlisle and Stranraer. I have been jotting down some of the points while I was ransacking the guidebooks, and really we shall have our work cut out for us before we reach Carnryan Tower. Listen. They begin the minute you cross the border. Gretna Green—well, that's nothing. Kirtle Water—that is where Helen of Kirkconnell was shot in saving the life of her lover——'

'Oh, if you take account of all the imaginary stories——' his wife objected.

'My dear,' said he, 'it isn't an imaginary story. It was a very actual occurrence—as the gentleman who fired the shot found out. The slaying of Burd Helen wasn't at all the end of the incident—a little interview had to take place between the lover and the murderer—don't you remember?—

'My sword did draw,
Stern was our fight on Kirtleshaw,
I hewed him down in pieces sma',
For her sake that died for me.'

Then what comes next? Dumfries. I don't know how

we are ever to get away from Dumfries and its neighbourhood. Of course we must drive out and see Ellisland, Burns's farm; and Friar's Carse, too; then there's Lincluden Abbey; Drumlanrig Castle; Maxwellton Braes—we'll maybe find another Bonnie Annie Laurie tripping over the dew; Craigenputtock, where Thomas the Thunderer prepared his bolts before coming up to London; Sweetheart Abbey, that Devorgilla built in memory of her husband—thirteenth century work that must be; Caerlaverock Castle; Threave Castle; Dundrennan Abbey, where Queen Mary spent her last night in Scotland, after the battle of Langside——'

'Phil,' said his wife to him, 'if you are going to give so much time to these old abbeys and monasteries, what do you say to Sabie and me going on to Carnryan and waiting for you there? Indeed, if you are going to spend so much time on this little bit of Scotland, how are we to know anything of the country generally? I thought we should see something of the lonely islands in the west, and the mountains, and certainly Edinburgh and Melrose; and you wanted to go back by Yarrow—that's away somewhere else——'

'Here's gratitude,' said he, 'for my having crushed twenty pages of guidebook into ten lines. However, we'll make this compact. You bear with as much architecture as you can; and, on my side, when you think a place is not likely to be interesting, I'll cut it out; Sabina to be umpire.'

So that was settled; but both Sabina and Philip knew very well that it was no ignorant lack of interest in historical or poetical associations that had prompted Janie's little protest; it was that she was anxious to show Walter Lindsay that his friends had not forgotten him in his trouble, but were quick with their sympathy.

That night they stopped at 'Merry Carlisle'; and next morning were up betimes and on the ramparts of the red castle; looking away across the green meadows and the winding Eden towards the pale blue line of the Scotch hills at the horizon. Then they crossed the Border; and guessed at the place where

> '*In my arms Burd Helen dropped,*
> *And died for love of me.*'

They spent two days in and around Dumfries. They went on to Castle-Douglas. They made their way into the famous Kingdom of Galloway that is 'blest with the smell of bog-myrtle and peat.' Finally, in this slow fashion, they rested a night at Newton-Stewart, so as to take the morning train to Stranraer; and there they found awaiting them at the station a waggonette to convey them to Carnryan.

It was a beautiful soft-aired June morning; and the country through which they drove was picturesque enough —with occasional glimpses of the sea; but there is no doubt that the two women-folk were very much preoccupied, not to say anxious and nervous.

'You'd better say nothing at all,' Philip Drexel had advised them. 'It would only be an embarrassment. Clearly he is determined to put a brave face on it; just you talk to him as if nothing had happened.'

'It seems hard, though,' Janie said wistfully, 'that —that he shouldn't know how sorry we are.'

'You can't say anything well,' remarked Mr. Philip, who had a little common sense; 'and what is the use of saying it badly? And don't you think he will understand?'

When at length they arrived at Carnryan they found it a quite modern place (the old tower, as they afterwards discovered, was on a promontory facing the sea). The house was two-storied, wide, and straggling; surrounded by fair meadows and woods; and with a high-walled fruit-garden at some distance away. The French windows, the trimly-kept lawn, and flower-pots, were all very cheerful and pleasant; if they had been expecting anything of the grim and gray dignity of an ancient Scottish keep, they were speedily disillusionised.

They alighted from the waggonette, and were received by an elderly man-servant and a smart young maid, who informed them that Mr. Lindsay was down in the fruit-garden, but would be forthcoming directly, as he would hear the carriage-wheels. So they did not go into the house; they loitered about the front door, looking at the shrubberies, and the larch-trees, and the beds of forget-me-

nots; and at certain small round puff-balls under a distant hedge, which they found out to be white rabbits.

Then Lindsay made his appearance at some way off, walking rather slowly, with his hand resting on the shoulder of a young lad. His tall form was as erect as ever; but his head was bent a little forward, as if he had fallen into a habit of listening intently. When he came still nearer they could see that there was no appearance whatever of his being blind; there was not even a shade over his eyes. But they heard the boy say to him, in an undertone, 'There's a gentleman, sir; and a tall young leddy; and anither ane not so tall.'

He came forward, holding out both his hands.

'I beg your pardon a hundred times,' he said. 'This is hardly a Scotch welcome—I should have been at the door to receive you; but I fancy Sandy has come a good pace, or else I've mistaken the time. And this is you, Philip—and this is you, Janie—then this must be you——'

'Sabina!' she said, with a touch of entreaty: she could not be left out of the little friendly circle.

'I am glad you have brought such fine weather with you,' he said, cheerfully. 'Didn't you think the country looking pretty as you came along?'

'Oh, beautiful—beautiful!' Janie's husband said.

The two women could hardly speak. It was so piteous to hear him talk approvingly of all these summer things around them, and still to be so far away from them: it seemed

almost as if he were imprisoned within some living tomb.

'Come into the house, then,' he said, as if he would himself lead the way.

And then he hesitated—and put forward his foot a little, to find where the stone step was; for the young lad had withdrawn a space, to leave his master free to talk to his guests. At this moment it happened that Sabina was next to Lindsay, and could not but see his helplessness.

'Will you take my hand?' she said, and she gently put her fingers on his arm, and guided him into the hall.

It was her right hand that she put on his arm; with the left she was brushing aside the tears that, in spite of herself, rained down her face.

CHAPTER LI

AT CARNRYAN TOWER

JANIE's keen desire to visit the northern isles and hills, and Edinburgh, and Melrose, and 'the dowie dens o' Yarrow' had apparently gone away from her mind now; she seemed well content with this bit of western Wigtonshire; and indeed they found the neighbourhood exceedingly picturesque and interesting. Of course they insisted on Walter Lindsay accompanying them on all of their excursions; and the attendant who went with them, perched up on the box-seat beside the driver, speedily discovered that his office had become a sinecure. It was 'the tall young leddy' who had supplanted him; devoting herself entirely to Lindsay; and never wearied of telling him of all that was around them as they walked along. She did not need to lead him. Somehow he knew when she was close by. Her voice was a sufficient guide—perhaps an occasional touch of her dress, too. Naturally, when they were stepping into a boat, or passing under the archway of some old ruin, she gave him her hand; but ordinarily they merely walked side by side—her face turned towards his.

They were thus strolling along the shore one morning, she stooping now and again to pick up a shell or a bit of crimson weed, but ever returning to her welcome task of describing the fair world around them; and Janie and her husband were following some little way behind.

'If Walter had only his eyesight for ten minutes!' Janie said, wistfully. 'If he could only see the expression of her face every time she turns to him. There is one thing surely he must notice—that her voice changes whenever she speaks to him. Whatever she may be saying to us—whatever nonsense may be going on—the moment she speaks to him it is all gentleness; and you know how soft and kind her voice is when she chooses. That is what I have said for years and years, ever since I have known her; the way to win Sabie's love is through her pity. Walter Lindsay used to be too well off; she never could be brought to care for him. So I suppose it is true that there may be a soul of good in things evil. I daresay if she had not come through that dreadful time of trouble, she would never have got to know what a true friend he is; and I am quite sure, if this misfortune hadn't befallen him, she wouldn't have the sympathy with him she has now. And very little trouble she takes to hide it. If he could only see, for a second, how she watches his face when she's telling him anything—to gather whether he's interested; yes, and the quickness with which she is the first to get him his stick and his hat when we are coming out; and the

eagerness with which she listens to him—and her quick approval—ah well, I don't know what may come of it; but apparently Sabie is quite happy whenever she is with him.'

Thus said Janie in her incoherent way; her husband took a more practical view.

'What ought to come of it is clear enough. To make of two broken lives one whole one is the sensible thing.'

'He is too proud to ask her,' Janie said.

'Let her ask him.'

'She can't. Besides, he would refuse to accept such a sacrifice—that is, if he was likely to be permanently blind.'

'Now, look here,' said Mr. Philip. 'That is a subject which we can't speak of to Walter; but you and I may speak of it; and I assure you that his determination to look at the worst side of the possibilities must have grown up when he was living here by himself, and giving way to depression and gloom. Or he may think it right to school himself to face the worst that can happen. Very well; that may be reasonable enough; but you must remember that the chances are really the other way. No doubt, many of the operations are unsuccessful, but the majority of them are successful; and you know what the doctors said—that everything depended on the general health of the constitution. Well, look at Lindsay. He has never had a touch of gout or rheumatism or anything of the kind all his life long. I say the chances are all in his favour. Of course,

the anxiety must be dreadful; and I can understand a man, in a kind of half-despair, saying to himself that he will rather look forward to the worst, so that he may not be wholly crushed if it should happen.'

'I wonder what Sabie thinks,' Janie said, absently. 'I am afraid to ask her. And I suppose, if he were to be permanently blind, it would be too great a sacrifice for her to make? I know, if the positions were reversed, it would not be too great a sacrifice for him to make; he would sacrifice anything, everything, for Sabie's sake. But you don't often meet with a devotion like that. He told me himself—but mind, you must not tell Sabie this—that when it first occurred to him there was something wrong with his eyes, he began to think there would be at least this compensation in being blind, that Sabie would always have the same beauty for him, that he would always think of her as he had first known her. There never has been anything that he would not sacrifice, and willingly and gladly, for her sake. But I don't know about her.'

'You don't know about her?' her husband repeated, staring at her. 'Well, I like that! Oh, of course you want me to argue that she is bound to make the sacrifice? I am not going to say anything of the kind. But this is clear enough—that, if the success of that operation depends considerably on the general health of the patient, our little trip here seems to have done Lindsay a world of good. He is in ever so much better spirits than when we came.'

'That is because Sabie is his constant companion,' was Janie's answer. 'And I must say for her, that when she sets about making much of any one, she does it with a will. There is no mistaking it. I remember, in the old time, mother declaring she was a most horrible flirt because of the way she was "going on" with Walter at his own house one night. But she wasn't "going on." When she wants to be good to you, as the children say, she certainly can, and she doesn't care who sees it, either.'

'Well, then,' said Mr. Philip, 'it is clear we are not doing Lindsay much harm by keeping him occupied and cheerful; and I have been thinking we might add on two or three days more to our visit. We can't be in the way, for he has nothing to do and the house is big; and the servants just as obliging and good-natured as they can be. Well, now, I was thinking of Monday next; shall we say Wednesday instead?'

'If you will stay to the end of the week, Phil,' Janie answered, 'I will give up any one of the places I wanted to see—any one you like.'

'The end of the week? Well, we must first ask for an invitation. And then we'll see what Sabina says.'

But Philip Drexel had himself already cut out one portion of their travelling programme—that referring to the Braes of Yarrow. He seemed to have lost interest in the gray and shadowy figure which, in his London dreams, he had pictured as on Yarrow's banks, with a world of mystic

gloom around her. For even as the blood of an anæmic person is flushed by fresh air and sunlight and exercise, so Mr. Philip's imagination, under the constant stimulus of historical and legendary scenes and associations—to say nothing of the brisker health begotten of rowing, and climbing, and moorland-tramping—had warmed into colour. Among Lindsay's books he had discovered the ballad of 'Fair Annie'; and he had gradually put away from him the gray phantom of Yarrow's banks for this brighter, if still pensive, figure—that of the forsaken mistress who is bidden to 'lace her in green cleiding' and 'braid her yellow hair' that she may welcome home the bride—

'Fair Annie stood in her bower door,
And lookit ower the land;
And there she saw her ain gude lord
Leading his bride by the hand.
She's drest her sons i' the scarlet red,
Herself i' the dainty green;
And though her cheek looked pale and wan,
She weel might ha' been a queen.'

This was what he was busy with now; and so the visit to Yarrow's haunted stream was discarded, or at least postponed; and there was so much the more time to add on to their lingering in the pleasant Kingdom of Galloway.

When Philip asked Lindsay to keep them on for another week, he winded up his not ineffectual prayer by saying, 'And the best thing you can do at the end of the time is to come along with us. Moping down here won't do you

any good. Come with us for a run through Scotland; and then go back to London with us.'

But Lindsay would not hear of it.

'I should be a continued drag on you, and you have plenty to do. Besides, I have grown familiar with this place; I can get about a little, even when Jamie isn't by. Of course I shall have to be in London for a brief time; we shall meet then. In the meanwhile, Phil, my lad, don't talk about your going, there's a good fellow. I don't want even to think of it—until it's over.'

If these days, then, were now numbered, at least they were halcyon days. The visitors had not committed the usual mistake of English folk in going to Scotland just at the very worst time of the year for weather. And how quickly the time passed! In the morning, after breakfast, they all went outside, for the mignonette was sweet in the soft June air; and if Janie and Philip generally strolled off by themselves, Sabina had found out for herself a warm bank at the southern edge of the lawn, where it was pleasant to sit. Thither she brought Lindsay's chair, and the daily batch of newspapers; and she could make a shrewd guess as to what interested him most when she began to read—not the squabbling of Synods and Presbyteries, and not the sham objurgation of party politics, but rather the reports from the salmon-rivers, and accounts of any new picture-exhibition in London. Then the waggonette would come round to the door; the stragglers would be

summoned to get ready; and presently they would be driving away along the coast, or up and over the wild moorland country, until, at mid-day, they sought out some sheltered spot for opening the luncheon-basket. The afternoon Mr. Philip usually devoted to desperate attempts at acquiring the art of fly-fishing—from a boat on a small loch hard by. Sometimes the others accompanied him; and it was very little the two women knew of the imminent peril they were in from the erratic cast of flies, especially when there was a bit of a breeze on behind the fisherman. Lindsay, of course, could not see; and the saturnine Jamie, sitting at the oars, merely sniggered to himself and said nothing; but nevertheless Mr. Philip flogged away with his variegated cast of Zulu, Blue Dun, and Coch-y-bondu; and if he sometimes caught up in his own clothes, or occasionally lodged the Coch-y-bondu in the gunwale of the boat behind him, these were but trifling mishaps; and eventually his patience and resolution were on most occasions rewarded by the capture of a few innocent small things, attracted by the passage of the drop-fly across the surface. Then home to dinner; after which there was smoking, and chatting, and music; sometimes, on these warm-scented June nights, they opened the French windows, and went abroad in the stillness, for there was moonlight now; and it was strange to hear, in the silence, the occasional soft mewing of some distant seagull, or the whistle of a curlew down by the shore.

On the last night of all these nights, Philip proposed that they should walk up to the old tower, to have a last look at the coast, and the silvered sea. All this evening Lindsay had been silent and preoccupied; Sabina had tried her best to cheer him, but without avail; no one had dared to speak of the departure on the morrow; and indeed the restraint on all of them was only too obvious. So this proposal was rather gladly accepted: and when they went out into the hushed night, Janie and her husband led the way, as was their wont, and Sabina followed with Lindsay, her hand just hovering near his arm.

It was a beautiful night; and the farther they climbed the steep ascent, the more they could see of the still, moonlit water, and the successive gray promontories running out away to the south. There was not a sound; even the seabirds were silent now; and the whispering of the ripples along the shore was too faint to reach them here. And Sabina had ceased to try to entertain him; her own heart was not over light; perhaps she felt there was much to say that she could not say.

When they reached the tower—which was part of the ruins of a stronghold built by the Robert Lindsay who fell at Otterbourne—they found that Philip and Janie had gone inside and were trying to make their way up to the top. Sabina did not choose to follow them; she seated herself on one of the big stones lying all about; and Lindsay remained standing by her side—his fingers just touching

her dress near the shoulder, that he should know she was there.

For some little while there was silence; then she said (recurring to her duties for the last time), 'I don't think I ever saw the sea so still. And there is a small steamer right in the way of the moonlight—jet black it is; it is so strange to see it slowly crossing that wide silver pathway. Where will it be going? Over to Ireland?'

He paid no heed to her question; it was not of the sea he was thinking.

'So you are really going away to-morrow?' he said, in rather a low voice.

'Yes,' she answered simply, 'and I have no heart in going.' Then, with an effort, she gathered courage to say what she wished to say. 'You must not imagine that I go willingly. I think I have been of some little service to you. I think you like me to be with you. And I would like to stay if I could. You did not forsake me—in my time of trouble. If I am going, I have no heart in going; believe that.'

The hand that was so near her touched her; it was trembling a little.

'Sabina, you almost make me speak when I had determined to keep silent—and if I could——' But here he paused for a second. 'No, not yet; not as I am now; I cannot. But perhaps hereafter—it may be different; I must wait—and then—if it is different—I will come to you.'

She could not fail to understand.

'You do not trust me,' she said. 'Do you think *that* would make any difference to me?'

He bent down a little; perhaps it was to listen for the least sound of her voice: it was a habit he had got into since his eyesight had left him.

'Sabina, if the worst were to happen—would you still have pity on me?'

For answer she took the hand that was hovering over her shoulder, and held it in both of hers, and kissed it.

'My best and dearest friend,' she said, and there was even a touch of pride in her simple self-surrender, 'I wish to be with you always; but if that were to happen—then more than ever.'

CHAPTER LII

AT A PICTURE SHOW

Walter Lindsay neither let nor sold his town house and studio. On all sides he was informed that the most skilful oculists in the world were to be found in London; and when the time was drawing nigh for the operation for cataract to be performed, he repaired thither. Nor did Janie and Philip and Sabina leave him much chance of sinking into a nervous apprehension and gloom. Nearly every evening they went round to his studio, for Sabina was staying with these good friends just then; and Lindsay and they were near neighbours. Sometimes Sabina took to him or sent him flowers. It was a fair exchange.

'O dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sat at the wine,
How we changed the napkins frae our necks?
It's no sae lang sin syne.'

In her time of trouble he had shown her a kindness that she treasured in her inmost heart; and now it was her turn, in a smaller but in no unwilling way, to pay him all kinds of little attentions and send him daily remembrances. They were not undervalued by the recipient of them.

During the week of suspense that followed the operation Janie was terribly anxious; Sabina much less so. Indeed, her apparent or schooled indifference not only surprised Janie, but pained her: and she ventured to remonstrate.

'Even if the worst should happen,' Sabina said calmly, 'I am quite prepared for it; it will not be so very dreadful.'

'Sabie!—have you no regard for his fame as a painter?'

'I have a greater regard for his love,' was the answer (these two being alone together at the time).

'What do you mean, Sabie? Would you rather have him always dependent on you—is that what you mean? It can't be that you imagine, if he were to recover his eyesight, he would care for you any the less, when you know quite well that never in all your life were you looking as pretty as you are now—that can't be it?'

'Janie, don't talk as if my interests should be thought of at all,' Sabina answered. 'Of course, if Walter gets back his sight, that will be a joyful day for all of us. But if it isn't to be—well, we will do what we can to make his life pleasant for him; and I for one am not going to be downcast, even at the worst.'

But she was hardly under such good control on the momentous day when the examination was to be made. She and Philip and Janie were all in the house; the doctor was in the room upstairs. It had been hinted to them that, as far as it was possible for medical skill to judge, there was every reason to believe that the operation would prove to

have been successful; but notwithstanding that, Janie was very visibly agitated; and Sabina, though holding herself in restraint, seemed to be listening intently, as if for some footfall on the stair, and she started at the smallest sound. Janie, indeed, could not keep still. She went from one place to another. Not a word was spoken by any of them. At last she left the room, and crept noiselessly up the staircase, and hung about the landing. She could hear them speaking within; surely those voices were cheerful enough?

Suddenly the door was opened.

'Good-bye for the present!'

'You'll tell them, doctor?'

'Oh yes: they're waiting below—they won't have left, depend on it.'

Then he shut the door; and the next moment was confronted in the dusk by this poor, timorous, apprehensive, speechless ghost.

'Oh, it's all right,' said he. 'Very satisfactory indeed.'

Janie flew down the steps—how, she could never afterwards understand—and rushed into the room.

'Sabie! Sabie!'

And then her arms were round her friend's neck, and she was kissing her on one cheek and the other cheek again and again and again. It was all the message she could deliver—but it was understood between those two.

A long time after that—last June, indeed—it was an-

nounced that on a certain day there would be opened in Bond Street an exhibition of water-colour drawings and sketches, chiefly of the River Shannon; and on the previous Saturday there was a Private View, at which a large number of the artist's friends were assembled. It was a goodly display, considering that most of the series had been produced within eighteen months—though some of the drawings were of an earlier date. It was one of these older ones that seemed to have caught the fancy of a noble and gracious lady who would insist on Lindsay going round the room with her; and so profuse were her praises that, in order to get away from them, he said,—'Yes, I like that one myself—for it was just underneath those trees that I caught a twenty-eight pound salmon.'

'Really, now!' said this good lady. 'How very interesting! Twenty-eight pounds—that must have been a large fish. What did you do with it?'

'I sent it to Sabina Zembra.'

'Sabina Zembra?' she said inquiringly. 'Who is that?'

'Don't you know? There she is—over in that corner—talking to the little old gentleman with the ear-trumpet,' said Lindsay, looking towards a tall young woman in a dress of silver-gray plush, with a beefeater's hat of the same material, and with one deep crimson rose at her breast.

'But that is your wife!' said this noble person, peering through her eyeglasses. 'Ah, I see—that was her

name, was it? What a very extraordinary present to send a young lady!'

'What else could I send her—from the Shannon?' he asked.

At this moment Janie came along.

'It's all right,' she said, in an undertone; 'Phil has been down to some place in Piccadilly, and got a room where we shall be by ourselves. Sabie and I will follow whenever we see you going to the door. And Phil is waiting outside.'

The consequence of this manœuvre was that, a few minutes thereafter, these four were seated at lunch in a private room of a well-known restaurant; and they seemed rather glad of this respite from their public duties.

'When I first thought of having an exhibition of this kind,' Lindsay said, 'my wildest hope was that that young woman there would condescend to come to the Private View. I little expected to see her mistress of the show.'

'I assure you that it is remarkably nice,' Sabina said. 'You've no idea what pretty things have been said to me this morning. And do you think I was going to make any protest? That wouldn't have been business-like. I felt far more inclined to say, "Good gentleman, or pretty lady, your opinion is quite correct; and will you buy?"'

'You mercenary wretch! However, we've little cause to complain on that score; and I mean to make our holiday this year a thoroughgoing one. I suppose you have

got everything ready for Monday morning, Philip—rods and nets and everything?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'Oh,' continued Lindsay, 'I heard a pretty story about you the last time I had to run down to Wigtonshire. The boy Jamie says that when you were fishing from the boat you were continually catching up on the gunwale behind you. Now how did you manage that? You must have doubled the flies right behind. And do you know you were whisking them past people's faces?'

'Can the boy Jamie use a rod himself?' Mr. Philip asked.

'Oh yes, Jamie can throw a fly.'

'Then perhaps it would have been better for the young ruffian to have given me some advice instead of treasuring up a tale about it.'

'Never mind, we'll show you how to lift your line behind you when we're all back in Galloway again. Yes, and there's some nobler sport for you, my lad, when we go on to Cromarty; wait till you find yourself fighting a fifteen-pounder—then Janie will have to be by to give a scream when you bring him to bank.'

Coffee and cigars were brought in, but the little party could not idle here much longer; the artist had to go back to receive his patrons and friends. As they were going downstairs he said, 'Look here, Mr. Phil, most likely I shall see you to-morrow some time or other; but if I don't,

mind you come a bit early on Monday morning. Euston Station, 9-45, that's the watchword; and then—"*Take your seats for the North!*"'

It only remains to be added that Sir Anthony Zembra, who has at length had the honour of office conferred on him, came to the show that afternoon; and was vastly complimentary. At the dinner-tables which he adorns with his handsome presence, he is quite fond of talking of his son-in-law; and at the last banquet of the Royal Academy, on being called on to answer for the House of Commons, he made pointed reference to his own personal and immediate association with art.

THE END

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